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RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKES  
POUND KYIV** **WORLD**



**UP TO ₹12.5L REWARD  
FOR INFO ON TERROR  
ACTIVITIES** **J&K**



**PLENTY OF ROOM TO  
BOOST MUSHROOM  
CULTIVATION** **INFOCUS**

**INS VIKRANT GETS NEW  
RADAR, MISSILE LAUNCH  
PLATFORM** **BACK PAGE**



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MONDAY | 1 JANUARY 2024

**THE TRIBUNE WISHES ITS READERS  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR**



**WELCOMING 2024** Fireworks over Sydney Harbour during New Year celebrations on Sunday. AP/PTI

## India ramps up security in Arabian Sea as US thwarts Houthi attack on vessel

**AJAY BANERJEE**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31** On a day of fast-paced developments, a major shipping company suspended its operations for 48 hours through the Red Sea, US Navy helicopters downed two missiles after being attacked by Yemen-based Houthi rebels while the Indian Navy announced the formation of task groups comprising war-

### DETOUR TO HIT TRADE

- If trade via Red Sea is restricted further, India's trade with Europe, US and western Africa will be hit
- Alternative route is via southern tip of Africa, takes extra 10 days for travel from India to Europe
- The longer route is bound to raise fuel and manpower costs

ships, planes and UAVs to protect the vital trade route. Yemen sits at the eastern

edge of the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait, connecting the Arabian Sea with the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal. If the trade through Red Sea is restricted further, India's business with Europe, US and western Africa could be impacted, raising fuel and manpower costs. The alternate route through the southern tip of Africa is 40 per cent longer,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

## India's self-confidence soaring, momentum must continue: PM

In 108th Mann Ki Baat, asks people to share artistic creations on Ram Temple

**AKSHEEV THAKUR**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31** There is excitement and enthusiasm in the country over Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and people should share artistic creations in this regard using common hashtag #ShriRamBhajan, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 108th episode of his monthly radio show 'Mann Ki Baat' on Sunday as he listed India's achievements in 2023. The consecration ceremony of Ram Temple will take place on January 22.

Asserting that India was brimming with self-confidence, PM Modi urged people to maintain the momentum in 2024. "Today every corner of India is brimming with self-confidence, imbued with the spirit of a developed India; the spirit of self-reliance. We have to maintain the same spirit and momentum in 2024 as well," he said.

The PM said he continued to receive congratulatory messages on the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) successful launch of Chandrayan-3. He



A special broadcast of PM Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' organised by the Indian Minorities Foundation near the Jama Masjid in Delhi. ANI

### KEEP NATION FIRST, WORK FOR WELFARE

"We have to work for development of India keeping in mind the Panch Pran (pledge)... There is no greater mantra than 'nation first'. Adhering to this, Indians will make our country developed and self-reliant. Narendra Modi, PM

### LISTS 2023 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Continue to receive messages on Chandrayaan-3 success
- Success for 'Naatu-Naatu', 'The Elephant Whisperers' at Oscars
- 107 medals in Asian Games; 111 in Asian Para Games
- Team India's show in WC; women team win in U-19 T-20 WC
- 40th rank in Global Innovation Index, up from 81st in 2015
- Most Indian varsities in QS Asia University Rankings

pointed to India becoming the world's fifth largest economy and the success of

the G20 Summit. Urging citizens to put "nation first" in every work

they undertook, the PM said: "The record business on Diwali proved that every Indian is giving importance to the mantra of 'Vocal For Local'."

India's twin wins at this year's Oscars for "RRR" song "Naatu Naatu" and documentary "The Elephant Whisperers" also found mention in PM's address. He said the world saw India's creativity and understood the country's connection with the environment through its entertainment industry.

"When 'Naatu Naatu' got the Oscar, the whole country rejoiced. Who was not happy when they heard about the honour given to 'The Elephant Whisperers'? Through these, the world witnessed India's creativity and understood our bonding with the environment," he added.

He then lauded the athletes for bagging 107 medals in Asian Games and 111 medals in Asian Para Games. "Indian players won everyone's heart with their performance in the Cricket World Cup. The victory of our women's cricket team in the Under-19

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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## Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, founded by Geelani, banned for 5 years

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31** The government on Sunday declared pro-Pakistan separatist group Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, founded by late hard-line separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, as a banned organisation for the next five years.

The action, announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, is a response to the group's involvement in fomenting terrorism and spreading anti-India sentiment within the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, J&K (TeH), has been declared an 'unlawful association' under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The outfit is involved in forbidden activities to separate J&K from India and establish Islamic

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Air surcharge: Leh and beyond Rs 2.00

### IN BRIEF

#### India-UAE joint military exercise from tomorrow

**NEW DELHI:** The joint military exercise — Desert Cyclone 2024 — between India and the United Arab Emirate will be held from January 2 to January 15 in Rajasthan. **INSIDE**

#### CBSE counselling for students from today

**NEW DELHI:** The CBSE on Sunday announced provision of psychological counselling starting from January 1 for students and parents. The initiative is aligned with the already announced exam schedule. **BACK PAGE**

## Panagariya to head finance panel

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31** The government has constituted the 16th Finance Commission with former NITI Aayog vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya as its chairman. Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey, a 1998-batch IAS officer from the Karnataka cadre, has been appointed as the secretary. Other members of the commission would be notified separately, said an official news release.

Panagariya was the first vice-chairman of NITI Aayog

### FIRST VICE-CHAIRMAN OF NITI AAYOG

Arvind Panagariya was the first vice-chairman of NITI Aayog after PM Modi came to power in 2014. Mentored by free-market votary Jagdish Bhagwati, Panagariya has done stints at the World Bank and allied institutions

after PM Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. Mentored by free-market votary

Jagdish Bhagwati, Panagariya has done stints at the World Bank and its allied institutions. He currently teaches at Columbia University whose economics teaching faculty once had Milton Friedman, Joseph Stiglitz and Bhagwati. The commission is expected to make its report available by October 31, 2025, covering a period of five years from April 1, 2026.

The Finance Commission is a constitutional body set up every five years and is responsible for giving non-binding

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

## Punjab refuses to send tableau for Bharat Parv

**SANJEEV SINGH BARIANA**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 31** Continuing his tirade against the Centre over the rejection of Punjab's tableau for the Republic Day parade, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann today refused to send the state's tableau for display at Bharat Parv saying the martyrs who featured in the creation didn't deserve a place in the "rejected category". Mann's reaction came in response to the Centre's com-

### Centre says state didn't adhere to R-Day theme

munication dated December 30, which said that the "state/UT not selected for the Republic Day parade will be given an opportunity to display its tableau during Bharat Parv, being organised separately at Red Fort from January 23-31". The CM maintained the martyrs of the stature of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

## Living near power unit for 40 yrs, locals to shift at last

**MUKESH TANDON**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**PANIPAT, DECEMBER 31** The new year is set to finally bring relief to residents of Panipat's Khukhrain village, who have been waiting to shift to a new location for the last 40 years. The villagers of Khukhrain, adjoining Panipat Thermal Power Station (PTPS) and a cement plant, have now been promised by the district administration that they would be moved out by January 31.

The power plant was set up in 1979 while the cement unit came up in 2005-06.

The villagers have been living in a pathetic condition due to the proximity to the two plants. The water discharged by the thermal plant raised the watertable over the years, causing walls of houses to develop cracks, while the fly ash from the plants reportedly resulted in air pollution. There's hardly a family in the village where

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

## ISRO to ring in 2024 with satellite to study black holes

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will usher in the New Year with a foray into a new area of measuring cosmic X-rays. The 25-hour countdown commenced on Sunday morning for the lift-off scheduled from Sriharikota at 9.10 am on January 1.

The X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) will piggyback on a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C58)



### FIVE-YEAR MISSION

- PSLV-C58 rocket will carry X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) and 10 others to be deployed in low-earth orbits
- XPoSat will investigate polarisation of X-ray from celestial sources, including black holes; mission life is 5 years
- ISRO will launch its first X-ray Polarimeter satellite on Jan 1. ANI

rocket along with 10 other satellites for deployment in low-earth orbits.

Cosmic X rays are widely prevalent in the atmosphere and two-thirds of it come from

celestial objects such as clusters of galaxies, black holes and remnants of exploding stars (supernova remnants).

The XPoSat, with a mission life of five years, will be among the very few satellites that will investigate and measure the polarisation of intense X-ray sources in space. This will enable scientists reach the source of celestial sources emitting these rays. The launch of the XPoSat will be the second ISRO venture in a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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2024

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WEATHER

FORECAST



Dense fog

SUNRISE: 7.13 am

SUNSET: 5.35 pm

TEMPERATURE

DELHI

Max: 16°C Min: 11°C

GURUGRAM

Max: 18°C Min: 12°C

FARIDABAD

Max: 18°C Min: 11°C

NOIDA

Max: 17°C Min: 11°C

HELPLINE

Emergency response: 112

Women Helpline: 1091

Special cell (Northeast): 1093

Missing person: 1094

Vigilance: 1064

Senior citizens: 1291

Cyber complaints: 1930

Traffic issues: 1095



# Revellers ring in New Year amid security

ANSHITA MEHRA  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
As the Capital embraces the arrival of the New Year, the Delhi Police have mobilised over 10,000 personnel to guarantee a safe entry into 2024 for all the city residents and visitors.

With security concerns at the forefront, enhanced measures, including additional pickets, barricades and paramilitary deployment, were implemented to address potential issues during New Year celebrations.

A senior police officer highlighted the focus on curbing hooliganism and traffic violations, especially at borders to prevent disturbances from neighbouring states.

Rohit Meena, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Shahdara, said, "We have identified 59 spots, where people will celebrate New Year, and taken steps to ensure the prevention of drunken driving and prioritise eve-teasing incidents."

Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) SS Yadav emphasised the identification of more than 500 vulnerable points to ensure the



People throng India Gate on New Year's Eve in New Delhi on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO: MANAS RANJAN BHUI

safety of the common man and prevent hooliganism or traffic violations.

Recognising the potential for peace disruption due to various events and demonstrations by various organisations, the Gautam Buddh

Nagar police had also announced strict prohibitive measures in the region until January 1.

Given the usual high footfall at popular joints like Connaught Place, Lajpat Nagar, Ansal Plaza, among

others, the Delhi Fire Services has proactively made arrangements to handle emergencies during New Year celebrations.

The Delhi Police posted on X: "New Year's Eve par

mast se rehna ka lekin zara halke zara bachke, agar animal banker bawaal ya non-stop dhammal machaya toh kahin aisa na ho ki 2024 ka pehla din apni The Great Indian Family ke bajaye Indian Police force ke saath manaana pade."

# At 382 AQI, Delhi ends 2023 on 'very poor' note

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
Delhi residents continues to grapple with deteriorated air quality as the curtain fell on the year. Air quality index (AQI) in the national capital was recorded at 382 on Sunday.

Despite the marginal improvement from the AQI readings on Saturday, the air quality remained concerning with AQI at several neighbourhoods crossing the 400 mark.

Mundka recorded the AQI at 424, Mandir Marg at 400, Najafgarh at 404, Nehru Nagar at 422, Okhla Phase 2 at 403, Patparganj at 410, Punjabi Bagh at 422, Pusa at 401, RK Puram at 421, Sirifort at 414 and Sri Aurobindo Marg at 418.

Besides, multiple trains and flights were delayed due to the fog. On Sunday, the minimum temperature was around 11°C, approxi-

## EV POLICY EXTENDED FOR THREE MONTHS

The Delhi Government has decided to extend its Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy, set to expire on Sunday, for another three months, officials said. PTI

mately 5 degrees above normal, accompanied by a layer of fog in the morning. Although sky was mostly clear, shallow fog persisted throughout the day and sunlight remained elusive.

A yellow alert for fog has been issued for January 1, with temperatures expected to range between 16°C and 8°C. The Capital is likely to register moderate to dense fog in the morning with cold day conditions in some areas on the first day of 2024.

Clear skies with moderate to dense fog in the morning is predicted for the next week until Thursday.

## e-rickshaw driver hit by traffic cop's vehicle, dies

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31

A 42-year-old e-rickshaw driver died after he was allegedly hit by the vehicle of a Delhi Traffic Police personnel on Saturday.

The deceased has been identified as Amit Jha, a resident of Sagarpur, while the police official has been identified as Mukesh Kumar (45). The incident occurred in the Mayapuri area of west Delhi. An eyewitness alleged that the police personnel was drunk.

DCP Vichitra Veer said, "A PCR call was received on Saturday morning at 8:30 at the Mayapuri police station regarding an accident, where an e-rickshaw driver was hit by a Maruti Swift car driven by Mukesh Kumar, a Delhi Police employee, who was currently posted with the traffic unit."

The police said the injured were taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital. However, Jha succumbed to injuries. The family and a group of e-rickshaw drivers protested outside the Mayapuri police station for not conducting a blood test.

The police said further investigation was underway but did not comment on weather the police official was drunk at the time of the incident and his arrest. However, they said that medical examination of the accused had been conducted. — TNS

## Kingpin of Mewat ATM thieves' gang nabbed

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
The Special Cell of the Delhi Police has arrested the alleged kingpin of a Mewat-based gang of ATM thieves, while he was on his way to Guwahati to commit another crime, an official said on Sunday.

The accused has been identified as 31-year-old Mohd Jahid. He has allegedly been involved in 15 cases registered in the Delhi and various states. The official said Jahid was also a 'proclaimed offender' in two cases.

"A trap was laid around

the red light at Palam Airport and Jahid was nabbed from the spot," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Alok Kumar.

On interrogation, it also came to light that he and his associates had recently stolen Rs 7.5 lakh from an ATM booth in the Wellcome area of Delhi and a case had already been lodged there.

"The remaining members of the gang have also been identified, and efforts are on to arrest them as soon as possible," DCP Alok Kumar said. — IANS

## HSVP allots plot from unacquired land

BIJENDRA AHLAWAT  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**FARIDABAD, DECEMBER 31**  
The allotment of a residential plot by Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) without acquiring the land has left the allottee harassed and devoid of relief despite directions issued by the CM himself.

"I have been running from pillar to post since July 27, 2022, when I was allotted a residential plot by the HSVP through e-auction in sector 77 in Faridabad," says Manish Singhal, a resident of Hathin subdivision of Palwal district.

He said he was shocked when the plot — 142-GP Sector 77 F — was found to be encroached upon by some-



one when he was about to take over possession.

He said while a complaint was lodged with the authorities, including the police and the HSVP office here, for removal of the encroachment, he was told that the problem had erupted due to the fact that the land on which the plot was

located had not been acquired by the HSVP.

Claiming that though the HSVP admitted to its fault, it failed to provide any resolution to the issue. This made Singhal lodge a complaint at various platforms including with the CM, Chief Administrator HSVP, Chief Secretary, Com-

missioner, ADC, besides online complaints to CPGRAM and consumer helpline portals.

On November 29, the District Grievances and Redressal Committee chaired by the CM directed the HSVP to work on the options of providing an alternative plot of the same category and size or refund the money with interest based on the applicant's choice.

Sidharth Dahiya, Estate Officer, HSVP, said though the office here received a communication for refund of the plot cost, the matter has been sent for reconsideration to the higher authorities for alternative plot allotment as per the directions of the CM recently.

## Woman kills mother over property dispute, arrested

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31

A 36-year-old woman was arrested for allegedly killing her mother over a property dispute in outer Delhi's Ranhola area, police said on Sunday.

The accused, Promila, works as a teacher and was living with her father, who had separated from her mother Beermati (65), they said.

According to the police, Beermati's daughter-in-law Asha found her body, which bore multiple stab wounds on the neck and limbs, near the disputed plot on Saturday morning. Later, Beermati's family informed police. — PTI

## AAP failed to ensure development: Delhi BJP prez

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva criticised Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for alleged corruption and failing to ensure development in the national capital in 2023.

Sachdeva said Kejriwal had promised to transform Delhi into the best metropolitan city, if given power in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). However, a year after AAP secured the majority in both the Delhi Government and the MCD, the city has regressed into one of the worst metropolitan areas in India, he lamented.

He highlighted AAP's bro-

GIVES WARM CLOTHES TO HAWKERS

On the final morning of 2023, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva visited the newspaper hawkers of Krishna Nagar and Patpadganj in east Delhi and gave them warm clothes. Sachdeva highlighted the continued relevance of newspapers, especially in delivering local news even in an era dominated by digital news consumption.

ken promises regarding the management of landfill sites. Despite Kejriwal's commitment to clearing three landfills within a year, the city saw the emergence of a new garbage dump at the Ghazipur landfill and the conversion of parts of Sanjay Van at Mehrauli into a new garbage dumping site.

He also described sanitation conditions as deplorable, with visible garbage dumps

lining the city's roadsides. He said the pollution situation, primarily attributed to dust pollution, was underscored by an alarming Air Quality Index (AQI) recorded between 390 to 422 at different observation centers on December 31.

Sachdeva blamed poorly maintained PWD and MCD roads for the escalating dust pollution, emphasising that it was a local factor.

Talking about the poor state of Delhi Government and MCD schools, he highlighted the lack of teachers and inadequate arrangements for science and commerce education at the senior secondary level were highlighted.

Sachdeva said Delhi Government and MCD hospitals and clinics were in a pathetic condition. Patients were reportedly facing delays of 12 to 18 months for basic tests and operations.

He said public road transport was portrayed as on the brink of collapse. He pointed out the aging fleet of CNG buses belonging to the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC).

## Will have to go to jail for paths chosen for public good: Kejri to AAP workers

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said that his party had gained popularity for its "work-centric politics" and asserted the party workers should be ready "to go to jail for the paths we have chosen for the public good".

Chairing the National Executive and 12th National Council meetings of the party, held virtually on Sunday, he said, "The Aam Aadmi Party has risen to the third place among 1,350 political parties in these 10 years."

"If we were not successful

## Was asked by ED to appear on Jan 3 in excise policy case

and did not do anything good, then none of our party leaders would have gone to jail and today everyone would have been happy with their families," he said. Kejriwal's remarks assume significance since the Enforcement Directorate has asked him to appear before it on January 3 in connection with the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case.

Addressing the party workers, he said, "If you give good education to children, you will have to go to jail. If you provide free treatment to the poor, you will have to go to jail. We will have to go to jail for the paths we have chosen for public good."

At the National Council meeting, Kejriwal asserted that the AAP has given the country a viable alternative in electoral politics and has gained popularity for its work-centric politics.

He also praised Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for the remarkable progress in the state. — PTI

## Over 360 illegal weapons seized in '23

SANJAY YADAV

**GURUGRAM, DECEMBER 31**  
The Gurugram police arrested 466 persons in 352 cases and seized more than 360 illegal weapons from their possession this year. Besides, 338 others were arrested on the charges of drug smuggling.

According to the police data, the 466 persons were booked under the Arms Act for the possession and supply of illegal arms. On an average, the police seized more than one illegal weapon daily.

The seized weapons included 348 country-made pistols, 11 revolvers, 511 cartridges, seven magazines and six knives. A large number of accused were involved in the supply of illegal arms from Uttar

INTER-STATE SUPPLY

The seized weapons included 348 country-made pistols, 11 revolvers, 511 cartridges, seven magazines and six knives. A large number of accused were involved in the supply of illegal arms from UP, Rajasthan, Bihar, and MP

Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi-NCR region.

There has been a rise in the drug smuggling network in Gurugram as revealed by the increasing number of cases registered under the NDPS Act. As per the police data, a total of 338 persons were arrested against 267 cases registered under the NDPS Act since January 1. Large quantities of illegal drugs,

including 1,097 kg marijuana, 3.34 kg sulfa, 0.94 kg heroin, 6.65 kg chura post and 1.21 kg of other drugs and banned medicines were seized from the accused's possession.

Apart from this, 1,927 others were arrested under the Excise Act this year. In 1,573 FIRs registered, the police seized 1,62,766 bottles of illegal liquor and 46 litres of handmade liquor.

On the other hand, Gurugram also witnessed a surge in the prostitution cases with the arrest of 40 persons.

"Our police teams are always on alert to keep tabs on criminal activities. Owing to this, the police was able to nab more criminals and seize illegal arms, liquor and drugs from them this year," said ACP (Crime) Varun Dahiya.

## LOOKING BACK 2023

SUMEDHA SHARMA  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**GURUGRAM, DECEMBER 31**  
Gurugram and Nuh, the two districts of the state standing on different ends of the development horizon, were bound by a common notoriety this year: the Nuh clashes.

The only Muslim-dominated district in the state had been rendered as an epitome of communal harmony over half a century. However, communal clashes that erupted in the district this year left seven persons dead and residents scarred for their lives.

The violence spilling over to Gurugram was a major



Garbage dumped in the open in Gurugram. FILE PHOTO

blow to the reputation of the popular IT hub. Although Gurugram is a potboiler of many cultures, the city had been simmering with communal under currents over open namaz and cow vigilantism for the past year or two.

The communal clashes highlighted the failure of the local police and authorities in maintaining law and order. Besides, the clashes triggered one of the biggest migrant exodus from the city after the Covid crises. The exodus,

which started after local vigilantes threatened the Muslim migrants, led to a major service deficit.

While Gurugram residents were forced to plead to their maids and cab drivers to come back. Multinational companies declared work from home. It left a dent on many planned investments, said Gurugram MP Rao Inderjeet Singh.

However, on an optimistic note, the two districts saw the development of road infrastructure that is bound to change their fate. The opening of Delhi-Mumbai Expressway passing through Nuh has become one of the biggest achievements of the region. It not just boosted the realty prices but brought Haryana closer to Rajasthan and

gave a major push to the state's freight dreams.

The expressway has been a hit since its opening and saw new stretches opening every alternate month.

Gurugram is scaling new heights of road infrastructure development. However, it witnessed the problem of waterlogging in the monsoon and is struggling with deteriorating air quality this winter.

Meanwhile, the city saw one of its worst sanitation crises. Failure of the MC in maintaining basic services and four strikes by sanitation workers in a year made netizens rechristen city as the 'Kuda Gram'.

The latest strike that went on for over two months has turned various roads, empty plots, streets and green belts into garbage dumps.



# Guest teachers seeking regular jobs cane-charged in Y'nagar

Union state president suffers head injuries | Others detained, freed later

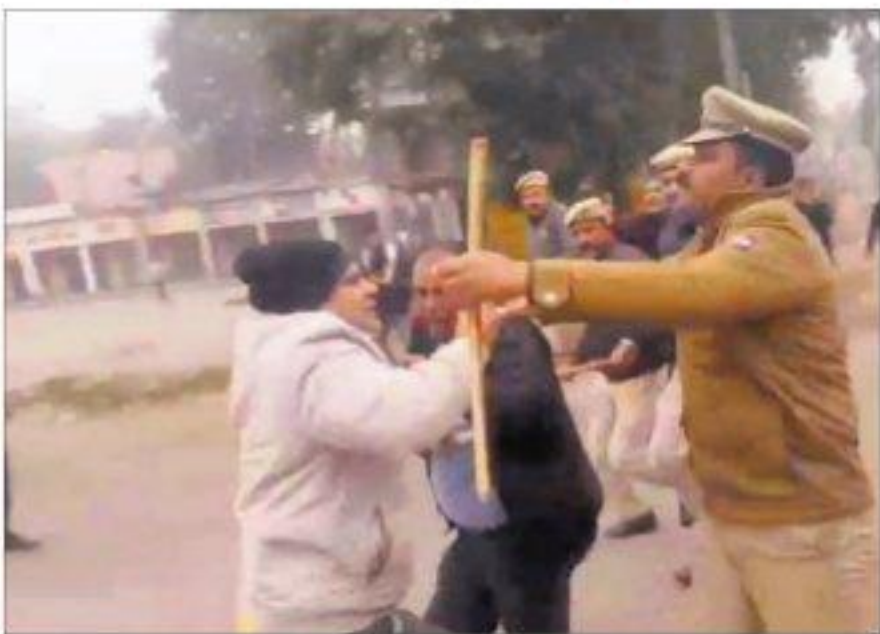
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMBALA, DECEMBER 31  
Guest teachers under the banner of Rajkiya Atithi Adhyapak Manch, who reached Yamunanagar to raise their long-pending demand of regularisation of their jobs and for a 'mahapadao' (large sit-in) in front of the residence of the state Education Minister, were cane-charged on Sunday.

As per the information available, the guest teachers from various districts of Haryana had reached Yamunanagar. Earlier, they had gathered near a private palace but they were shifted to the grain market for dharna. They had planned to move towards the residence of Education Minister Kanwar Pal for a 'mahapadao'.

They were stopped by the police, leading to arguments and confrontations between the police and the guest teachers. Then, the police used force to disperse the agitators.

State president of the manch Rajendra Shastri suffered head injuries and was taken to Civil Hospital for treatment. A couple of guest teachers also reportedly suffered minor injuries. Some guest teachers were detained, but later, they were released.



Police disperse guest teachers in Yamunanagar on Sunday.



Rajkiya Atithi Adhyapak Manch president Rajendra Shastri.

## MILD FORCE USED

“The guest teachers were trying to reach the Education Minister's residence to start a permanent dharna... They also had some arguments and scuffles with the on-duty policemen. Mild force was used to stop them.

Ganga Ram Punia, YAMUNANAGAR SP

demand. The teachers have been staging dharna in Karnal for past 115 days, but to no avail. Today, we reached here to raise the demand before the Education Minister. We are not bad elements but still, we were brutally cane-charged. We will continue to struggle till our demand is fulfilled.”

Meanwhile, the Yamunanagar police said, “About 200 guest teachers had gathered for an indefinite dharna in support of their demands. Initially, they were planning to camp near the residence of the Education Minister. But the police did not allow it. After this, they gathered in the grain market in front of the Mini Secretariat.”

Yamunanagar SP Ganga Ram Punia said, “The guest teachers were trying to reach the Education Minister's residence to start a permanent dharna. Efforts were made to persuade them but they were adamant. They tried to run towards the other gate to keep moving. They also had some arguments and scuffles with the on-duty policemen. Mild force was used to stop them. I have received information about one person suffering injury. Appropriate action will be taken in this matter and a case is being registered.”

and the guest teachers will hold a meeting for the action ahead.”

Rajendra Shastri, state president of the manch, said, “The guest teachers have already put in 18 years of their lives and they have been struggling to get their jobs regularised, but the government has been insensitive toward their

## Questions being raised on meeting called by outgoing MC

RAVINDER SAINI  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

ROHTAK, DECEMBER 31

A meeting of the General House of Rohtak Municipal Corporation (RMC) is scheduled to be held on January 3 and agenda items pertaining to issues of their wards have been taken from councillors for discussion or approval.

But, questions were being raised over the 'logic' of seeking agenda items from the councillors as the tenure of the RMC councillors is going to end on January 9, while many projects/proposals were already lying unexecuted even after the approval of the General House.

“The meeting is nothing except eyewash as many ambitious projects have failed to take off even after a long time despite being accorded a nod by the General House of the RMC. A pro-

Term of councillors to end on January 9

posal to set up the RWA office, multipurpose hall and dispensary was approved in the general house meeting in September 2019 but it has not yet been executed,” said Kadam Singh Ahlawat, the councillor from Ward-11.

Ahlawat maintained similarly, another approved proposal for extension of community Center in Sector-14 failed to take off following the want of funds. “It is beyond my understanding what logic is behind seeking agenda items from the MCs when already approved projects are not being executed,” he asked.

Another councillor having affiliation with the ruling BJP said there was not a single ward where all approved projects had been executed so it would have been better to organise a get-together-cum-farewell party instead of discussing/approving the agenda items at the meeting of the General House.

RMC Mayor Marmohan Goyal admitted that many ambitious projects and proposals had not yet been executed due to lack of funds. “The meeting has to be called following pressure from the councillors.”

## Fog, cold wave continue to hit life in state; red alert in northern dists

DEEPPENDER DESWAL  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

HISAR, DECEMBER 31

As fog and cold wave continued to hit normal life in the state, the IMD on Sunday issued a red alert for the state's northern districts and orange alert for other parts for the first day of New Year.

Due to the prevailing condition, the Sun remained elusive throughout the day on Sunday in the state. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast, there is a possibility of partly cloudy sky in the state for the next couple of days. It also issued an orange alert for next four days in the entire state.

An IMD bulletin said there would be no major changes in minimum temperature in the next four days in the state. “Farmers are advised to give light and frequent irrigation to protect the wheat, mustard and other Rabi crops from cold



A thick blanket of fog covers a road in Hisar district on Sunday.

conditions. To prevent crop from freezing injury, apply sprinkler irrigation,” the IMD advisory stated.

The farmers, however, were happy with the favourable weather conditions for the Rabi crops as mustard was at flowering stage and wheat crop germinating ears/headings.

The IMD said the daytime

temperature was 14.6 degrees Celsius in Hisar that was six degrees below the normal for this time of the year. The minimum temperature in Hisar was at 9 degrees Celsius, three degrees above normal. Narnaul recorded the minimum temperature in the state at 7.2 degrees Celsius last night.

## CM Flying Squad conducted 2,236 raids and search operations in state

LOOKING BACK 2023

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 31

The CM Flying Squad has conducted a total of 2,236 raids/search operations throughout the year on various government departments/institutions and non-governmental entities.

As many as 454 cases were registered against those involved in food adulteration, 255 cases against those running illegal establishments, 321 cases of irregularities in various government departments, 187 cases of overloading/illegal mining and 108 cases of irregularities in government ration depots/mid-day meal stocks and black marketing.

In collaboration with the Electricity Department in



## 454 CASES OF FOOD ADULTERATION

As many as 454 cases were registered against those involved in food adulteration, 255 cases against those running illegal establishments, 321 cases of irregularities in various government departments, 187 cases of overloading/illegal mining and 108 cases of irregularities in government ration depots/mid-day meal stocks and black marketing.

Gurugram, the flying squad exposed electricity theft in a crusher resulting in a penalty of over Rs 3 crore.

In Faridabad, a factory producing illegal foreign cigarettes without licence was raided, seizing approximately 10 lakh cigarettes

valued at around Rs 2 crore.

Additionally, actions were taken against corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, with arrests made in cases related to bribery in obtaining RC permits and NOC certificates.

## Delhi again blames state for rising ammonia in Yamuna river

GURUGRAM, DECEMBER 31

The Delhi AAP government has yet again trained guns at Haryana for increased ammonia levels in the Yamuna. Water Minister Atishi has accused Haryana of allowing unrestricted discharge of pollutants into the Yamuna, leading to an alarming rise in the ammonia levels in the river.

She said that the high level of ammonia in water was impacting the production capacity of the Chandrawal and Wazirabad water treatment plants leading to water scarcity in many areas.

A senior official of Water Ministry said that industrial effluents from Haryana's Sonapat, Panipat and Rohtak districts and UP's Ghaziabad and Noida districts continue to pollute the Yamuna. Delhi alleges that drains number 2 and 6 from Haryana carry toxic industrial pollutants that fall into the Yamuna.

Due to frequent discharge of industrial waste, the level of ammonia in raw water rises, forcing the DJB to shut down water treatment plants till pollutants are washed away from the Wazirabad pond. Though Haryana is yet to officially react to allegations, a state minister said that AAP was just training guns at them to fool people and hide its inefficiency. —TNS

## CM launches one-time tax settlement scheme for traders

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

GURUGRAM, DECEMBER 31

Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday launched the one-time settlement-2023 (OTS) scheme that would give traders an opportunity to settle pre-GST tax liabilities. The scheme will be operational from January 1 to March 30.

“This had been a long pending demand of the business community and traders. We have given them this scheme as a New Year's gift. The move will enhance the state exchequer as well,” Khattar said. The Chief Minister also announced opening of a GST Training Institute in collaboration with Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA), Gurugram.

Taxes were categorised into four groups with exemptions from interest and penalties for cases related to seven tax Acts in effect before the imposition of GST.

Under the scheme, the tax amount was divided into four categories, starting with an undisputed fee category for cases without dispute. Taxpayers will pay 100% of the amount in this category, with no penalties or interest.

For disputed taxes under Rs 50 lakh, taxpayers will pay 30% of the outstanding amount. For disputed taxes above Rs 50 lakh, they will pay 50 per cent.

The third category applies to undisputed taxes assessed by the department where no



Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar launches the 'one-time settlement' scheme in Gurugram on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

## NEW YEAR'S GIFT FOR BUSINESS COMMUNITY

“This had been a long-pending demand of the business community and traders. We have given them this scheme as a New Year's gift. The move will enhance the state exchequer as well.

Manohar Lal Khattar, CHIEF MINISTER

appeal was made. Taxpayers will pay 40% if the amount is below Rs 50 lakh and 60% if it's above Rs 50 lakh. This category also offers relief from penalties and interest.

The fourth category included outstanding amounts due to differences in tax rates. Here, the government has discounted the amount, requiring taxpayers to pay only 30% of the total.

While offering tax relief, the OTS scheme also has installment option. Taxpayers with outstanding amounts below Rs 10 lakh must pay the entire sum in one lump sum before March 30. For Rs 10 lakh to Rs 25

lakh, the amount can be paid in two installments. If the outstanding is more than Rs 25 lakh, the payment can be spread across three installments: 40% in the first 90 days, 30% in the next 90 days, and 30% in the final 90 days.

Deputy CM Dushyant Chautala said the state has one of the best tax structure in the country and collected Rs 46,000 crore in taxes so far. “After the implementation of the OTS scheme, if businessmen, chartered accountants and tax lawyers cooperate, it is expected that tax collection in the state by March 31 can reach Rs 66,000 crore.”

## Despite two night shelters in Jhajjar, workers sleep in open amid biting cold

RAVINDER SAINI  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

JHAJJAR, DECEMBER 31

Migrant labourers, including women, and their children are compelled to spend their nights in the open amid biting cold at Jhajjar city despite authorities setting up night shelters.

A group of labourers and their families was found sleeping in the open on the footpath outside the mini secretariat when a 'The Tribune' team visited the spot on Saturday night. Similarly, another group of labourers has been spending nights at the grain market.

The district administration said it has set up two night shelters in the city. But, labourers say they don't have knowledge about such facilities.

“We have come to Jhajjar from Delhi. So, we don't have any knowledge about night shelter facilities. Cold is rising but we don't have any option except to sleep in the open,” said Pushpa, a migrant



Labourers sleep in open outside the mini secretariat in Jhajjar on Saturday night. PHOTO: SUMIT THARAN

labourer. Mandor, another migrant labourer, said nobody cared about poor people.

Covering himself with a blanket to brave the biting cold, Madan, from Rajasthan, said he had been suffering from fever for the past couple of days but was unable to get any help. “We all have arranged blankets and other woolen clothes to protect ourselves from the cold. Yet, chilled waves blowing for the past few days have made their

life more difficult,” he said.

Deepak Kumar, Nodal Officer (night shelter), said two night shelters - one at bus stand and second in old tehsil campus - had been opened where facilities of 35 and 20 beds, respectively. Arrangement for blankets, water and meal had also been made there, he said.

“All beds at night shelters on the old tehsil campus and over 20 beds at the bus stand are vacant. Labourers sleeping at

grain market is not in our knowledge. We will go there to bring them to the night shelter while other labourers staying outside the mini secretariat have made their jhuggis nearby. We will also reach out to them,” he added.

Vikas Kumar, District Red Cross Society Secretary, said a vehicle of the society daily carry out patrolling of the city at night and take the destitute, in any found, to night shelter.

## Right to service panel spent ₹23 cr on 801 complaints in 8 years: RTI reply

DEEPPENDER DESWAL  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

HISAR, DECEMBER 31

The Haryana Right to Service Commission (HRSC) has incurred an expenditure of Rs 23.66 crore from 2014 to 2022 while hearing 801 complaints, revealed a reply obtained from it on a Right to Information (RTI) application.

Interestingly, the commission that was set up with an objective of providing an effective framework for time bound delivery of services by government departments in 2014 did not receive even a single complaint in the first year of its inception (2014) and received only seven complaints next year (2015).

The Commission, however, got maximum 311 complaints in 2022. Till September this year, the HRSC received 81 complaints, but it did not disclose the expenditure incurred during this period.

## HRSC DIDN'T GIVE COMPLETE INFO: ACTIVIST

RTI Activist Subhash said the HRSC had failed to provide complete information on his application filed under the RTI Act. “I sought information on seven points, including appointment of its chairman, other officials and their salaries, allowances etc, steps taken to make people aware of the Right to Service Act, besides the complaints taken up by the Commission. For greater efficiency and accuracy, we advise you to file separate RTI applications for each specific subject matter as your application covers multiple subject matters making it challenging to segregate and obtain information from different branches.”

Overall, the HRTC informed that 69 of the total complaints were pending till September.

RTI activist Subhash of Haryana Soochna Adhikar Manch said a simple calculation indicated that on an average, it costs the commission Rs 2.95 lakh per case.

Besides, the HRSC informed that it had imposed penalty on 126 officials who were found negligent in disposal of their services. However, it revealed that 22 officials had not deposited the fine

imposed by the commission.

Notably, the HRSC takes up suo moto cognizance or complaints filed by the aggrieved consumers to ensure delivery of notified services within notified timelines. The state government has notified 655 services by 43 government departments and organisations under the Section 3 of the Act which has been given a timeframe for delivery of services. Retired IAS officer TC Gupta is chairperson of the Commission.



# Engineering students to review e-Adhigam module for government schools

MUKESH TANDON  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PANIPAT, DECEMBER 31

The third year students of polytechnic or engineering colleges would now review the e-Adhigam programme at the school level across the state. The Department of School Education (DSE) has made collaboration with the Department of Technical Education for it.

The Director-General, School Education, has directed all District Education Officers (DEOs) to conduct the training of students of technical education in collaboration with the colleges in their respective districts.

The state government had launched the programme, Advance Digital Haryana Initiative of Government with Adaptive Modules (Adhigam), last year, for providing e-learning to the students of Class IX to XII and distributed around 528 lakh tabs to them.

Through this scheme, the students get opportunities to learn from teachers across the globe. e-learning through tablets also helps the students in clearing their doubts while the schools are closed.

But, the students and teachers having the tablets were also facing problems due to some technical errors. Now, the Technical Education Department has been involved by the DSE for the proper implementation and review of the e-Adhigam programme at the school level. The third-year students of technical and engineering colleges will be involved for reviewing and identification of the problems under the e-Adhigam programme. The school mapping will be done by the Technical Education Department. The nodal officer appointed by the department will further send the names of the volunteer students to the DSE on a weekly basis. The voluntary participant will have to upload their inspection report counter signed by the school principal concerned within three days of the inspection.

The volunteer has to check and facilitate the distribution of tablets and data SIMs in all



## 23K TABLETS GIVEN TO STUDENTS

Devender Sharma, District Maths Specialist-cum-Nodal Officer of the e-Adhigam programme, said at present, around 23,000 tablets had been given to the students

### DIST-WISE BREAK-UP

District	Tablets to pupils
Gurugram	33,057
Panchkula	11,900
Ambala	20,474
Hisar	37,412
K'shetra	21,074
Sonepat	27,971
Jind	30,101
Sirsa	32,355
Panipat	23,337
Y'nagar	23,005
Jhajjar	18,373
M'garh	16,968
Fatehabad	23,799
Rohtak	18,653
Karnal	28,582
Rewari	19,297
Kaithal	27,555
Charkhi Dadri	11,189
Bhiwani	29,635
Faridabad	29,810
Palwal	18,295
Nuh/Mewat	25,254

schools, track data entry on the AVSAR portal at the school-level, check and facilitate the school staff in updating the latest version of the PAL. The orientation programme for the volunteer students will be conducted by the District Maths Specialists-cum-Nodal Officer of the e-Adhigam programme. Devender Sharma, District Maths Specialist-cum-Nodal Officer of the e-Adhigam programme said at present, around 23,000 tablets have been given to the students. The technical students from the engineering background would support more for the implementation of the e-Adhigam programme in the schools, Sharma said.

# People will give befitting reply to 'arrogant' govt: Deepender

Helicopter carrying ex-CM Hooda, Bhan unable to land due to fog

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KURUKSHETRA, DECEMBER 31

Congress leader Deepender Singh Hooda today said that the "arrogance" of the BJP-JJP government would be given a befitting treatment by the people of Haryana in the upcoming elections.

He was addressing a Jan Aakrosh rally at Ladwa grain market of Kurukshetra. MP Deepender Hooda said, "Corruption, drug addiction, crime and unemployment are on the rise in Haryana. People of other states are getting jobs in Haryana while the youth of Haryana are forced to go abroad in search of jobs. People are selling their agricultural lands and houses to send their children to other countries through illegal routes and they are not even able to come back for years."

"Our players are returning their awards to get justice. A woman coach is fighting for justice. It was the 'Raj Dharma' of the government to give justice and not support the accused but the government is arrogant and spoke nothing in support people seeking justice. Farmers, labourers, sarpanches, sanitation workers and other employees were cane-charged. The people of



Congress leader Deepender Hooda addresses a 'Jan Aakrosh' rally in Kurukshetra on Sunday.

Haryana will teach a good lesson to the arrogant government," he alleged.

Taking a dig at BJP-JJP coalition, Deepender said, "Before the elections, BJP gave the slogan of '75 Paar' and JJP gave the slogan of 'Yamuna Paar', but after election, they became 'paakey yaar' (fast friends). The JJP has betrayed the people of Haryana. Corruption files were closed and a free hand was given to corrupt people. The BJP-JJP government formed on the alliance of selfishness has completely derailed Haryana from the

track of development and made it a victim of corruption. The BJP and JJP failed to fulfil their promises."

Former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and state party president Udai Bhan, were scheduled to address the rally but due to poor weather, they had to skip the event. Deepender informed the gathering that due to foggy conditions, the helicopter couldn't land and it was taken back to Delhi.

Deepender highlighted the work done during the Hooda government's

regime and said that the Congress is working hard to put Haryana back on the path of development and growth. He urged the voters to support the Congress.

He promised a bypass for Ladwa, 300 units of free power, Rs 6,000 old-age pension, reopening of the closed government schools and revival of Dadpur-Nalvi canal project, if voted to power.

Ladwa MLA Mewa Singh, MLA Bishanlal Saini, senior leader Ashok Arora, Hamohinder Singh Chatha and several former MLAs addressed the gathering.

# 84 new borewells to be installed in Palwal villages to deal with waterlogging issue

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PALWAL, DECEMBER 31

The Irrigation Department has launched a drive to install 84 new borewells in the Hathin subdivision for dealing with the problem of waterlogging on the agricultural land of the district. The department aims at making a total of 148 borewells functional in the affected area, it is reported.

Sources in the Irrigation Department revealed that while nearly 64 borewells had already been installed in the low-lying areas of many villages falling in the Hathin subdivision over the past three years, a total around 1,000 acres was in the grip of the problem. The cumulative number of borewells in the region is likely to swell up to 148 as the state government has sanctioned adequate funds for the project, says Pravin Dagar, MLA, Hathin,



A borewell installed by the Irrigation Department at a Palwal village.

who inaugurated the construction work of a borewell at Mandkola village recently. The borewells will help in dealing with the waterlogging problem that had been persistent for over three decades, it is claimed.

However, the borewells that have already been installed have certain issues and a majority of these are yet to get power connection, it is revealed as there is no electric connection, these have been lying unused.

The affected villages include Akbarpur Natol, Jita Kherli, Siyaroli, Kahnoli, Mandkola,

Madnaka, Dwrenchi, Bhigawali, Mirpur, Chhainsa, Mathepur, Mahlooka, Norangabad, Hunchpuri Kalan, Hunchpuri Khurd, Ranseeka, Jalalpur, Rebar, Kotlaka, Kamarchand, Kurthala, Allika and Gughera.

Mohan Singh, a farmer, said there was no stable and long-term plans for dealing with the waterlogging issue. Though some pumps had been installed on a perennial basis, the slow pace of work had not given desired results despite the official claims made each year, he said.

"The problem has been seri-

ous and the farmers have been bearing the brunt," says Mahender Singh, an office-bearer of the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, a farmers' body.

He further said that it had affected the sowing of rabi crops almost every year. While the fields of many villages falling in the vicinity of the Gonchhi drain were among those affected. The water consumption capacity of the land in more than 10,000 acres had become minimal or lost completely, due to the area being low-lying and a high water table due to seepage caused by the canal.

"The civil work of the installation of 84 new borewells at the cost of Rs 4.70 crore has been initiated," said Mohit Vashista, Executive Engineer, Irrigation Department. He said the electrification of the already installed borewells would also be taken up soon.

## Haryana Diary

### Bridge project a subject of mockery

**Faridabad:** The bridge project over the Yamuna near Manjhawali village in the district has become a subject of mockery for some of opposition leaders. While the work on the project, claimed to be the pet project of the local MP, is still on, a political leader belonging to the opposition party remarked that the bridge project had failed to get completed even after 10 years despite there being a triple-engine government (BJP government in Haryana, UP and the Centre). The bridge, if it gets completed from the Faridabad side in the near future, will remain unused or non-operational, as no work has been taken on the UP side so far, to provide connectivity, it is claimed.

### Plans of Congress leaders may go awry

**Ambala:** Senior leader and former minister Nirmal Singh and Chitra Sarwara's decision of resigning from AAP and rejoining the Congress, on January 5, has not only come as a major setback for AAP but may also disturb the plans of some local Congress leaders. Nirmal Singh, a loyalist of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda's camp had accused Kumari Selja of betraying and had quit the Congress after Chitra was denied the ticket in the last Assembly elections. Some local leaders belonging to Selja group were making all efforts to strengthen their base for the Assembly elections, but the return of Nirmal and Chitra may disturb their plans.

### JJP's flag decree for party workers



**Rewari:** Gearing up for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on his visit to Rewari advised JJP workers to put up party flags at their residences. He also pulled up the workers for not putting up the party flags at their houses. "The flags not only haunt leaders of opposition parties but also create an impression in favour of the party, which helps in gaining power. This is an era of publicity so every worker will have to propagate the party's policies and work done in the past over four years. The impression will get created on its own in favour of the JJP if we do so," said Dushyant.

### Multiple ticket aspirants

**Gurugram:** With the Assembly elections due next year, the Gurugram and Badshahpur state Assembly seats are up for grabs. With speculations of the BJP not repeating previous candidates, over 15 aspirants are now fighting it out for the tickets. The aspirants are not only queuing up to meet the CM everytime he comes but are also making regular trips to Chandigarh. The maximum number of aspirants are from Badshahpur who have even requested a special meeting with the party state leadership for an 'amicable solution'.

CONTRIBUTED BY: BUENDER AHLUWAT, NITISH SHARMA, RAVINDER SAINI, SUMEDHA SHARMA

### REMEMBRANCE

In sweet, everlasting and  
revered memory of  
our parents  
**PROF. BISHAN SINGH  
SAMUNDRI**  
(01-01-1911 to  
09-12-1997)



Founder Vice-Chancellor, G.N.D.U., Amritsar and  
Sardarni **Dr. JAGJIT KAUR SANDHU (12.03.1930 to  
06.05.1991)** Retd. Principal S.R. Govt. College for  
Women, Amritsar, who left us for their heavenly abode.

— **SAMUNDRI** —  
373, Green Avenue, Amritsar. Phone: 09779122122

## Gujarat Governor unveils memorial to Raja Nahar

FARIDABAD, DECEMBER 31

Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat unveiled a statue of late Raja Nahar Singh — a martyr of the First War of Indian Independence and the ruler of erstwhile estate of Balabhgarh — at the Dasehra ground here today. Former Haryana Chief Ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Om Prakash Chautala, MP Hema Malini and BJP National Secretary OP Dhankhar were also present at the event.

The memorial has been built by Satvir Dagar, a social and political activist.

Devvrat said the late ruler's sacrifice during the Revolt of 1857 would not be forgotten. He said the king had assumed the throne at a young age, deterred the British from occupying Delhi for long and chosen to sacrifice his life for the honour of his country. He was later hanged to death by the British. Devvrat also remembered other freedom fighters and recounted the sacrifices made by them for India's Independence. BJP MP Hema Malini said the Jat community had always been at the forefront to serve the country. — TNS

## HOMAGE

Here's to an angel god sent  
So that all might dwell in his love;  
An angel who gave strength,  
Who loved unconditionally every being  
on this earth;  
Who stood by us gracefully,  
Putting joy and happiness in everything we did;  
Here's to PAPAJI, god's special angel.  
So loving and giving that we feel blessed  
and proud to be his children!

We pay our respectful homage and rededicate ourselves to your ideals

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**Reliance Commercial Finance Limited**  
(Member of Indian Overseas Bank & Maharashtra Sahakari Bank)

**POSSESSION NOTICE**  
(As per Rule 8(1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized officer of the Reliance Commercial Finance Limited under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of Powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice dated **08.01.2019** calling upon the borrower (s) /Co-borrower(s): **1. LAKHWINDER SINGH 2. KUSHAM RANI 3. DHARAMVIR SINGH & 4. RAM CHANDER DHARAM PAL** and to repay the amount mentioned in the notices being **Rs. 9,25,542/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Twenty Five Thousand Five Hundred Forty Two only)** within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notices.

The Borrower(s)/Co-borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on this **28<sup>th</sup> day of December of the year 2023.**

The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s) in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the secured property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Reliance Commercial Finance Limited for a total amount of **Rs. 9,25,542/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Twenty Five Thousand Five Hundred Forty Two only)** and interest thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

**DESCRIPTION OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

**All that piece and parcel of the Property Situated At Hosue No.10, Situated At Sp Colony, Village Foosgarh, Tehsil Karnal, District Karnal- 132001.**

Date : **28/12/2023** (Authorized Officer)  
Place : **Chandigarh** For Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd.

**Registered Office:** HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Panel, West Mumbai.  
**Branch Office:** Sadhaura, Yamunanagar, Haryana

**POSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV [RULE 8(1)]**  
Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd. under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) issued demand notice dated **09.10.2023** calling upon all the Borrowers and Guarantor (1). Jasbir Singh S/o Surjit Singh R/o Vill. Rattuwala (167), P.O. Safipur, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204 (applicant / Borrower); (2) Surjit Singh S/o Hans Raj Vill. Rattuwala (167), P.O. Safipur, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204 (Co-applicant / Borrower); (3). Manpreet W/o Jasbir Singh R/o Vill. Rattuwala (167), P.O. Safipur, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204 (co-applicant / Borrower); (4). Kamlesh W/o Surjit Singh R/o Vill. Rattuwala (167), P.O. Safipur, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204. (co-applicant / Borrower); (5). Surinder Singh S/o Bichha Ram R/o Vill. Rattuwala (167), P.O. Safipur, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204 (Guarantor) to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs.96,06,778.60 (Rs. Ninety Six Lakhs Six Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy Eight & Paise Sixty only)** within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

You all addressees having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to you all addressees and the public in general that the undersigned has taken symbolic possession of the property/asset described herein below on this 27th day of December of the year 2023.

You all addressees in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of HDFC Bank Ltd. for an amount of **Rs.96,06,778.60 (Rs. Ninety Six Lakhs Six Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy Eight & Paise Sixty only)** and interest thereon.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY:** Commercial Property alongwith construct and superstructure thereupon situated in Vill. Rattuwala, Po Safipur, Teh. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204, came in ownership of Kamlesh W/o Surjit Singh vide Regd. Transfer Deed bearing No. 1338, Dt. 12/01/2023 forming part of Khewat No. (58)/(57) Khatauni No. (69) Khasra No. (29)/(19, 21, 22), Khewat No. (60)/(59) Khatauni No. (71 to 73) Khasra No. (42)/(7min, 28)/(18/2, 24, 25, 42)/(4, 7min, 42)/(7 min) Khewat No. (71)/(68) Khatauni No. (92 to 95) Khasra No. (42)/(6min 41)/(1, 42)/(5, 6min, 42)/(6 min, 15) measuring (08 Kanal - 0 Marla), Mauja Rattuwala, H.B No. 167, Tehsil. Sadhaura, Distt. Yamunanagar-133204. Bounded by:- North: Agriculture Land of Sh. Vikas Kumar (220'). South: Road (220') East: Agriculture Land of Sanjeev Kumar (198'). West: Agriculture Land of Sucha Singh (198').

**Authorised Signatory,**  
Date: **27.12.2023** Place: **Sadhaura, Yamunanagar, Hry.** **HDFC Bank Ltd.**





“हरियाणा एक हरियाणवी एक” के मूल मंत्र को ध्यान में रखते हुए प्रदेश का समान विकास हमारी प्राथमिकता रही है और इन्हीं दो मूल-मंत्रों के आधार पर हम प्रदेश के चहुँमुखी विकास के लिए कटिबद्ध हैं।”  
- मनोहर लाल

From village to city, with every Scheme  
Haryana's People, fulfilling every dream

“केंद्र और राज्य में डबल इंजन सरकार की ताकत हरियाणा को तेज़ी से आगे बढ़ा रही है। कोई भी सेक्टर हो, जैसे ही उसमें सामूहिक शक्ति जुटती है, सबका प्रयास नजर आने लगता है, तो परिवर्तन की गति भी बढ़ जाती है।”  
- नरेन्द्र मोदी

Innovative initiatives

- **Dayalu Yojana** – Financial assistance up to Rs. 5 lakh to the families with annual income up to Rs 1.80 lakh in case of death of any family member.
- **Chief Minister Teerth Yatra Yojana** – For senior citizens above 60 years of age belong to the families with annual income up to Rs. 1.80 lakh
- **Revised Mukhyamantri Vyapari Kshatipurti Yojana** – Compensation for loss up to Rs 20 lakh to traders and businessmen
- **28,500 smartphones distributed free** of cost to Anganwadi workers
- **P.M.Shri School Yojana**–124 P.M.Shri schools started in the state
- **Haryana Income Augmentation Board launched** to increase the income of Antyodaya families
- **Haryana Antyodaya Parivar Parivahan Yojana** – Free travel facility in state transport buses to families with annual income less than Rs. 1lakh.
- **Chief Minister Antyodaya Milk Production Cooperative Incentive Scheme** – for Antyodaya milk producer families
- **Guru Shishya Kaushal Samman Yojana**– For Certifying the skill capability of craftsmen, labour and workers
- **Chief Minister Urban Housing Scheme**– Providing housing facilities to homeless people in cities
- **Pran Vayu Devta Yojana** – Rs 2750 per tree distributed to the custodians of 3819 trees for the care of old trees
- **Sanjha Dairy Yojana** – Scheme to open Sanjhi Dairy on Panchayat land in villages
- **One Time Settlement Scheme-2023**– For settlement of tax dues of traders and businessmen.
- **Monthly pension of Rs 2750 to widowers and unmarried people.**
- **33 percent ration depot** reserved for women
- Haryana Police honored with **President's Colour**
- **Cycle rally** organized from 1st to 25th September under de-addiction campaign
- Postal stamp issued in the name of **Emperor Hemchandra Vikramaditya**
- **8 percent reservation** for backward class 'A' for the posts of mayor of municipal corporations and president of city councils/municipalities.
- Country's **first elevated railway track inaugurated in Rohtak**



सुशासन ही आधार  
डबल इंजन हरियाणा सरकार

Striving towards People Welfare

- **14 toll tax barriers were removed** in year 2023
- 42 lakh families with annual income up to Rs 1.80 lakh are covered under **BPL Ration card** facility
- **Ayushman-Chirayu Yojana**– Treatment facility of Rs.5 lakh annually to 1.10 crore beneficiaries including families with annual income up to Rs.3 lakh.
- **Parivar Pehchan Patra** – Initialization of Disability Pension, Old Age Pension and OBC Certificate on Pro-Active Mode.
- **Social security pension** increased to Rs 3000 monthly from January 2024
- **1198 colonies in cities were regularized**
- Sugarcane price increased from Rs 372 to **Rs 386 per quintal.**
- An amount of **Rs. 112 crore issued** to farmers to compensate their flood losses through Kshatipurti Portal
- Incentive amount of **Rs. 138 crore released** to farmers adopting stubble management
- Honorarium of Asha workers increased from **Rs 4000 to Rs 6100 monthly.**
- Online Transfer Portal for Group-D Employees
- Monthly remuneration of Anganwadi workers **increased to Rs 14,000**
- Monthly pension of Matribhasha Satyagrahis, emergency victims and their widows and journalists **increased to Rs 15,000.**
- Scholarship amount for children of industrial workers **increased from Rs 5000 to Rs 16000**
- An amount of **Rs 4500 to women workers to buy sewing machines**
- An amount of **Rs 5000 for industrial workers to buy bicycles.**
- Increase in allowances of police personnel by two and a half times
- Players of **Haryana won 30 medals** in Asian Games-2022
- 100% railway **electrification work completed** in Haryana
- **Laid the foundation stone** of the state's second airport in Ambala
- **Bhoomi puja** of 2 new government medical colleges in Kaithal and Yamunanagar
- Commission of ration depot holders increased **from Rs 1.50 to Rs 2.**
- Sarpanch's honorarium increased to **Rs 5000 and Panch's to Rs 1600 monthly.**
- Honorarium of mayors, heads and members of municipalities **increased up to Rs 30,000 per month**



# The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Extraditing Saeed

Vital for India to mount pressure

PAKISTAN'S unwillingness to accede to India's request for the extradition of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed was obvious. As expected, within hours of India making its demand public, Islamabad effectively rejected it, stating that the two countries had no bilateral treaty to address such matters. Nevertheless, the message conveyed by New Delhi is significant. Pakistan's patronage of the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks continues unabated. The LeT and other terror groups are flourishing. Reports that Saeed's son Talha plans to contest February's general election is an endorsement of India's stand that mainstreaming of terrorist groups is a state policy in Pakistan. India had designated Talha as a terrorist under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in 2022. He serves as the LeT's second-in-command, controlling its finances.

A Pakistani court had sentenced Saeed to 31 years in prison in 2022 after he was convicted of terror financing. He had been found guilty on similar charges in 2020 and awarded a 15-year sentence. India views the prison terms as the outcome of the pressure exerted by the Financial Action Task Force and Western powers. Its request for extradition this time round also lists charges of money laundering for terror purposes. It's a reminder that international efforts against designated terror groups and their sponsors still lack a coherent and all-encompassing strategy.

The LeT and Jamaat-ud-Dawah, a front for the terror group, have been banned by the US and the United Nations. China remains a stumbling block, shielding Islamabad against sanctions by a UN committee that focuses on the principal perpetrators of the 26/11 attacks. Whatever the odds, it's vital for India to keep mounting pressure for action against the likes of Saeed. He represents an ideology that incites hatred and justifies terror. It has to be defeated.

## ULFA peace pact

Assam hopes to expedite development projects

THE year 2023 — headlined by the wars in Gaza and eastern Europe — concluded with a peace pact signed by the Central and Assam governments with the Arabinda Rajkhowa-led faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) on December 29. While the Paresh Baruah-led headline faction of ULFA is not a party to the agreement, it is a historic breakthrough in more ways than one.

Most importantly, it envisages the culmination of the 44-year-old armed struggle launched by ULFA in 1979, seeking a 'sovereign' Assam. The negotiations between the Centre and the pro-talks ULFA faction began in 2011 and have finally borne fruit, holding out hope for the insurgency-ridden state to expedite development projects with financial aid from the Centre. Simultaneously, a resolution of the socio-cultural strife in Assam is on the horizon as the pact promises to address the issues of illegal immigration and land rights for indigenous communities.

However, the Centre will have to tread warily as it still needs to deal with the hardline group of ULFA, whose leader Baruah is hiding somewhere along the China-Myanmar border. A series of kidnappings, extortion cases, killings and bomb blasts led to ULFA being outlawed in 1990, even as the draconian AFSPA was invoked, giving sweeping powers to the armed forces to crack down on violators of the law in Assam. Though the Act has been revoked in some parts of the state in the past two years, CM Himanta Biswa Sarma must work towards withdrawing it from the remaining areas too. Lasting peace and the end of a long chapter of insurgency are possible by ensuring that every citizen is part of the mainstream.

### ON THIS DAY...50 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

CHANDIGARH, TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 1974

### PONDICHERRY UPHEAVAL

THE DMK Government in Pondicherry, led by Farook Maricar, has fallen after being in office for four years and nine months. The exit of the government was necessitated by the resignation of two of the four ministers from the Cabinet and the party on Friday. They have joined the ADMK along with another DMK member of the Assembly. The outgoing Chief Minister had earlier said that he still commanded absolute majority, on the flimsy plea that he had received the resignations of the two ministers only from the Cabinet and not from the party and that no other DMK MLA had defected till then. Ultimately, he decided to quit after recommending the dissolution of the Assembly. Even in the normal course, elections to the Pondicherry Assembly are due to be held on February 24, and as such the fall of the government may not make much difference to the people at large as it might to the DMK in the circumstances. Though the resignation of the two ministers appeared to be a sudden development, it followed a growing rift between them and the Chief Minister. The Tamil Nadu CM, Karunanidhi, who is also the DMK President, said he was not shocked by the developments in Pondicherry as he had anticipated them. The defectors have accused both Maricar and Karunanidhi of following an opportunistic political line regarding the ensuing Assembly elections. The two rebel ministers were evidently not pacified even after the DMK high command included them in the state poll committee a month ago. The latest developments in Pondicherry may improve the strength of the ADMK there.

# OPINION

## The scourge of illegal migration

Nicaragua flight row points to the scale of the problem and the need for comprehensive reforms



KP NAYAR  
STRATEGIC ANALYST

UNKNOWN to nearly 300 Indian nationals on the ill-starred 'human trafficking' flight to Nicaragua, their attempt to sneak into prosperous North America was doomed a month before they boarded the Romanian charter aircraft.

On November 21, the US State Department invoked a provision in America's Immigration and Nationality Act to target, foil and punish those who were routinely ferrying foreigners into Nicaragua on charter flights. The traffickers' intention was to eventually push these foreigners into the US through dangerous overland and waterway routes northwards, the department alleged. The announcement, scarcely noticed in India at that time, made four key points. One, Nicaragua has emerged as a new illegal transit point for prospective migrants to the US through unlawful means and the Joe Biden administration is preparing to smash this racket. Two, criminal gangs are charging 'extortion-level prices' from migrants and exposing them to grave risks. Three, the US will hunt down such illegal immigrants even if they enter the country and repatriate them back home at a great cost, thereby dashing their hopes of realising the 'American dream'. Four, the US administration is preparing to crack down on 'owners, executives and senior officials of companies providing charter flights into Nicaragua'.

Section 212 (a)(3)(C) of the US Act "allows the Secretary of State to exclude any applicant whose entry or proposed activities in the United States would have potentially serious adverse foreign poli-



MENACE: Exploitation of Indians aspiring to go abroad is occurring on a global scale. REUTERS

cy consequences for the US'. The November announcement said it was this provision that Secretary of State Antony Blinken planned to use against the Nicaraguan kingpins of the immigration racket and their collaborators and facilitators around the globe. On the eve of the UAE-Nicaragua charter flight, the State Department reiterated that those operating such flights to Nicaragua, carrying migrants whose final destination was the US-Mexico border, would not be spared under the cited law. Unfortunately, this second warning by Washington was also missed in India.

It is assumed that a French government unit, which fights organised crime, was tipped off by its US counterparts once the latter gathered intelligence that a Legend Airlines flight with several hundred suspect Indians would land at the Vátry airport for refuelling. It is reassuring that transatlantic sharing of intelligence makes the world a safer place. But it also raises a disturbing question: Why was such intelligence not shared with New Delhi? After all, almost the entire plane load which was detained in France for four days at an airport ill-equipped for such emergencies comprised Indian nationals.

A reliable source in Washington said US officials did not want to

Even as Indians were boarding the flight to Nicaragua, the Central government was locking the stable door after the horses had bolted.

disrupt the flight before it was airborne. They wanted to effectively expose the migration racket by making it hit the headlines so that action would be taken on a global scale. While the plane, which even had unaccompanied minor passengers, was under siege at Vátry, it made news throughout the world. Christmas celebrations were disrupted in northeastern France and official circles in Paris because of the unusual incident, which made it big on television in Europe. Criminal gangs preying on wannabe migrants to the West will not attempt a similar flight, at least

for some time. As a preventive strategy, this was more effective than stopping the flight in question before it took off from the Emirate of Fujairah. A few weeks before the State Department invoked the punitive immigration law, Haiti suspended all flights from its capital to Nicaragua. The US had said that Haiti was a source — like India, it is now in the open — of illegal migration to North America via Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.

It is an irony that even as the Indians, who had begged and borrowed to pay touts lakhs of rupees to smuggle them into rich countries, were boarding the flight to Nicaragua, the Indian government was proverbially locking the stable door after the horses had bolted. On December 21, with a lot of fanfare, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) launched a programme with a habitually catchy acronym meant to capture the popular imagination. PRAYAS, which expands as Promoting Regular and Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals, "envisages development of a roadmap for improved coordination between Central and state governments to encourage sharing of best practices between states and enhanced engagement with the MEA on matters related to the international migration cycle." The police now say that at

least two plane loads of Indians were similarly taken undetected recently on charter flights to Nicaragua. In their calculated effort to dramatise the latest escapade of several hundred illegal Indian migrants to the West, crime-fighting agencies of the US and French governments kept not only India but also the United Nations in the dark about the extensive criminal network operating mainly from Punjab and Gujarat all the way to the Western hemisphere via Europe. PRAYAS is a joint project between the UN body, the International Organisation for Migration and the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi's oldest government-managed international relations think tank.

In yet another irony, the MEA warned a week before the Legend Airlines charter flight that "there has been a huge rise in the number of overseas job seekers being cheated by unregistered recruitment agents". Preying on Indians who want to go abroad is happening on a global scale. The MEA warned that "cases are being reported... in several East European countries, some Gulf countries, Central Asia, Israel, Canada, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic".

During every session of Parliament, the government gets a large volume of questions for zero hour on the scourge of illegal migration. A week before the Romanian flight, an MEA minister pleaded helplessness in the Lok Sabha about the complexity of the problem. "Many foreign countries do not provide information on illegal stay in their countries, until when there are orders of deportation," the minister said. He conceded that "our Missions do not have any reliable data on the number of Indians staying or working illegally in foreign countries". To say that this is shocking is an understatement. This will not do. The episode at the Vátry airport points to the scale of the problem and the need for comprehensive immigration reforms, failing which more Indians will become victims of migration touts and global criminal gangs.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Human trafficking is a scourge, a crime against the whole of humanity. — Pope Francis

## Glitter of gold saved the day

NJ RAVI CHANDER

IN the late 1980s, my bank colleague had a bizarre train adventure. He was returning to Mangaluru, his place of posting, from Bengaluru, his hometown. Besides meeting his relatives, his purpose of visiting Bengaluru was to settle a gold loan he had taken from the bank.

After completing the loan formalities, he took possession of his ornaments — a chain and a necklace. The chain dangled from his neck, while he discreetly concealed the necklace in a secret pocket in his trousers. That night, he bid farewell to his relatives and set off on his journey back to Mangaluru.

In the wee hours, he went to the washroom on the train. As he unfastened his pants, the gold necklace slipped out of his pocket, slid down the toilet and landed on the railway track. He dashed out of the washroom towards the nearest emergency chain and tugged at it. The high-speed train came to a screeching halt.

Everything happened in a trice, jolting some passengers from their sleep. The train driver and the TTE (travelling ticket examiner) rushed to the compartment in question to zero in on the passenger. My colleague was perspiring as he faced them; he told them why he had pulled the chain. Content with the explanation, the locomotive operator and the TTE stepped off the train in the night to search for the ornament.

The train had halted near a dense jungle in the Western Ghats, teeming with wild animals. Despite the danger, the railway officials were determined to help the passenger find the necklace. Armed with a flashlight, they strode out along with a few passengers. The search in the pitch dark extended beyond a kilometre on the tracks.

The team scoured the tracks for half an hour and concluded that it was an exercise in futility. They called off the search. Despite my colleague's desperate plea to venture further up to trace the ornament, the officials declined his request, citing safety concerns in the hazardous terrain.

Just as the search party was getting ready to hop on the train, the banker caught sight of a glimmer of light on the track only a few feet away. He rushed towards it and found his necklace. The tension quickly evaporated, giving way to palpable relief and joy. The luminous glow produced by the gemstone encrusted in the ornament had saved the day. Grabbing the necklace, he hurriedly made his way to the train. Luckily, the train had stopped before entering a tunnel; otherwise, finding the ornament would have been quite tough.

The train finally reached Mangaluru railway station. The banker submitted a written statement to the TTE as per the Railways' guidelines, mentioning the approximate weight of the necklace that was lost and found. He thanked his lucky stars — and the glitter of gold — for a happy ending.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Politics of intolerance

Refer to 'Hoping for liberal and inclusive politics' (*Nous Indica*); it is critical to denounce hatred based on religious affiliation. Delegitimising the identity agenda is easier said than done. Violence, fear and fanaticism are inimical to social and communal harmony. There is nothing inherently wrong in taking pride in one's identity — whether regional or religious. However, curbing the politics of intolerance and antagonism towards other beliefs and identities, especially for electoral gains, remains a national challenge, particularly in the run-up to the General Election. Course correction is essential to ensure that our hallmark of 'unity in diversity' doesn't lose its relevance.

LALIT BHARADWAJ, PANCHKULA

#### Bring everyone together

Apropos of 'Hoping for liberal and inclusive politics', the article aptly emphasises the need for delegitimisation of identity politics. The new year presents an opportune moment to discard the politics of hatred and animosity — which has caused considerable harm to peaceful coexistence — and encourage an inclusive and representative political discourse. The gesture of the PM to invite Church leaders to his residence to celebrate Christmas is indeed commendable. While some observers may view such an action in the election year as opportunistic, it signifies a shift towards the desired goal of inclusive and representative politics, bringing everyone together.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

#### Diplomatic win for India

Refer to 'Qatar reprieve'; the commutation of the death sentence of eight former Indian naval officers in Qatar is a positive development. It can be seen as a diplomatic win for India, particularly amid the Gaza conflict, given New Delhi's close ties with Israel and Qatar. The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Qatar's ruler during the recent COP28 summit in Dubai probably played an important role in this outcome, dispelling concerns about the former Navy personnel becoming geopolitical pawns.

SK SINGH, BY MAIL

#### Lax attitude

Refer to 'Riverbed mining'; illegal mining along the Neugal riverbed raises concerns about the apparent inaction of the local administration, the police, mining and forest departments. It appears that they are collectively in a state of deep slumber, turning a blind eye to this unlawful activity that has led to severe environmental degradation in the area. Despite written complaints from the residents and the village head, no decisive action has been taken against the culprits. The situation demands immediate and concerted action to combat the mining mafia.

BIR DEVINDER SINGH BEDI, SANGRUR

#### Metro for Chandigarh

Apropos of 'Metro no silver bullet to ease traffic woes of tier-II cities'; the writer virtually dismisses the Chandigarh Administration's proposal for a Metro, contending that it would spoil the city's picturesque landscape. Contemplating such an idea to address the growing traffic problem is akin to searching for one's car keys under a lamppost after having misplaced them inside a bar. The question is: why does a city like London not face traffic problems? The answer lies in the combination of an exorbitant entry tax for every private vehicle and exceptionally high parking rates. This strategy has compelled even the affluent and high-ranking daily commuters to opt for local buses and trains.

BALVINDER, CHANDIGARH

#### Liberalised pension after 14 years

Apropos of '14 yrs after soldier's death, mother gets liberalised pension'; it is ironic that Gurdial Kaur, mother of Naik Kulwinder Singh (who was killed in an avalanche 14 years ago), received the liberalised pension only after the intervention of an Armed Forces Tribunal Bench. The Defence Accounts Department released the family pension to the father of team leader Capt Prateek Puntambekar in January 2014, but continued to deny the benefit to families of other soldiers. Any interest accrued for delayed payments should be borne by the erring officials, along with remarks in their annual confidential reports.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL



# Look beyond military approach in Rajouri-Poonch



**LUV PURI**  
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

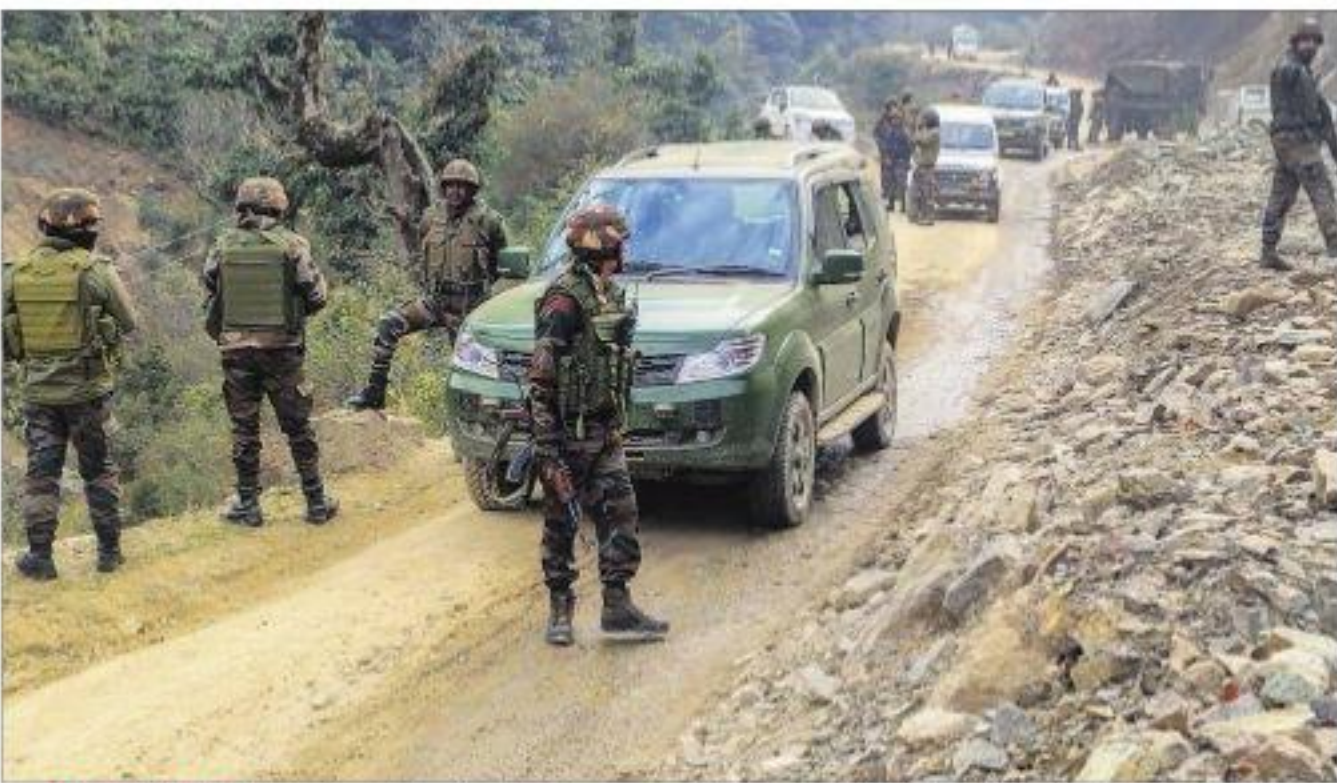
HERE seems to be no let-up in intermittent attacks on security personnel in the Rajouri-Poonch area along the Pir Panjal mountain range that separates the homogenous Kashmir valley from the geographically, religiously and ethnically heterogeneous region of Jammu. The responsibility for the attacks, like in previous cases, has been claimed by the People's Anti-Fascist Front, which reportedly emerged in 2019.

Since 2019, the militants' strategy has been to carry out targeted killings in the Valley and inflict losses on security personnel in Rajouri and Poonch districts. On December 21, four Army personnel were killed in an ambush at a spot between Dera Ki Gali and Bafliaz. A total of 59 people — 24 security personnel, seven civilians and 28 terrorists — were killed in Rajouri-Poonch in the past year. Psychological warfare is a component of the militant strategy, which is reflected in the fact that attackers use body cameras to film attacks and then upload videos on

social media. The mutilated bodies of soldiers, along with captured weapons, are frequently shown on social media platforms, accompanied by propaganda audios.

Unlike Kashmir, where the terrain consists of plains and a road network has been built, the transportation system in Rajouri-Poonch is underdeveloped. Therefore, the formulation of an effective counter-terrorism strategy will have to factor in the new set of challenges. By the mid-1990s, as detailed in my book *Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir: The Uncovered Face*, spanning the period from 1989 to 2007, the challenge intensified for the security forces in the religiously heterogeneous Rajouri-Poonch area as there was a greater presence of militants who did not speak Kashmiri, and they had started establishing their bases there.

Rajouri-Poonch is an extension of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in terms of ethnicity and geography. The only difference between the two areas in demographics is the presence of a significant number of Hindus and Sikhs, many of whose families migrated from across the Line of Control (LoC) in 1947; they are living majorly in Rajouri and Poonch towns in an otherwise Muslim-majority region. In PoK, there are no non-Muslims. In August 1965, many of the pockets in this belt were captured by Pakistani infiltrators as part of their Operation Gibraltar,



**RELENTLESS:** There is no let-up in attacks on security personnel in Rajouri and Poonch districts. **PH**

said to be the brainchild of the Pakistani officer in command of the region across the LoC, Maj Gen Akhtar Hussain Malik. Many Muslim families had also escaped across the LoC after the Indian Army re-established control, particularly in border areas of Poonch.

After 1990, it was always impossible to completely sanitise the surrounding peaks to facilitate Army movement. Road-opening patrols became a crucial part of the strategy since the mid-1990s. Several mid-level members of the official machinery have been ambushed by militants in the region in the past two decades. No doubt, the arduous terrain is a constant. However, one cannot ignore the failures in one of the most militarised areas of the

The attacks on security forces and the alleged custodial deaths are a setback to the investment made in border management over the years.

subcontinent due to its proximity to the LoC. The label of 'foreign militants' from Pakistani Punjab and PoK does not hold true in Rajouri-Poonch as militants coming from across the LoC are largely from the same ethnic and linguistic stock. This ensures easy assimilation. That is why the strategy of winning over the local community is at the heart of effective tactics.

A key initiative was taken by then PM Indira Gandhi, who realised the potency of the approach as part of the efforts to beef up border security. In 1976, she participated in a Gujar conference in J&K as part of the outreach to the Gujar-Bakarwal community, one of the main communities which live in this area. Over time, there has been a concerted effort to

forge strong bonds between J&K Gujar, who are Muslims, and Hindu Gujar, particularly from Rajasthan and the areas around Delhi. This endeavour aims to secularise the Gujar identity.

In 1991, Gujar-Bakarwals were granted Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and that solidified their support against terrorism, particularly in the elite sections of the community. A number of serving IAS and IPS officers, coming from the Gujar community, were direct beneficiaries of this decision. The multi-pronged approach yielded more dividends as the Gujar in the area collaborated with security personnel, contributing to cleansing the region of the ranks of a terrorist outfit, Lashkar-e-Taiba. One of the Gujar groups hailed from Bafliaz, and specifically, the Marrah hamlet, which is not far from the area where the recent attack occurred. After the attack, some community members were allegedly picked up by the Army on the suspicion that they were working for the militants; three of them died in custodial torture. The continuing attacks on security personnel and alleged custodial deaths are a setback to the investment made in border management over the years in an area that had almost become militancy-free two decades ago.

To understand the present, one cannot discount the overall context. Since the abrogation of Article 370, a

number of ill-thought announcements disturbed the delicate societal equilibrium of the region. One of them was granting ST status to the Pahari-speaking community, a diverse group that includes upper-caste Muslims as well as Hindus, brought together by a shared language. An impression spread among the strongly-knitted Gujar-Bakarwal community that the decision was detrimental to them. Also, the feedback of the political class to sensitise the security apparatus has been ominously missing since J&K has not had a legislative Assembly for the past five years. The official claim is that around 25 militants are active in the region, but it doesn't adequately explain why substantial losses are being inflicted. In an environment of militancy, the political class is always well aware of the happenings on the ground. It is also able to better contextualise the information as it is attuned to the ground reality. And when the macro contours of decision-making are determined in the national capital, there appears to be a void in terms of policy execution and calibration.

In a nutshell, addressing the security challenge in Rajouri-Poonch requires more than just a military approach; it must be embedded in local politics and a delicate societal equilibrium. Security, after all, is never solely a military problem.

# Pollution emerging as a key contributor to heart attacks



**SAMEER MEHTA**  
CARDIOLOGIST & CHAIRMAN,  
LUMEN FOUNDATION (US)

FOR decades, we have relied on an outdated understanding of what causes heart attacks. It is imperative to fathom the new risks that result in heart attacks, the world's number one killer of both men and women.

Pollution, a potent risk factor, has altered the landscape and a radically new approach is mandated. Without this, cardiologists and general practitioners will be doing injustice to a patient. A new approach in public health aspects of heart attacks is needed.

A simplistic understanding of the traditional risk factors assumed that heart attacks would occur among the section of the population that had diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol, and among smokers. Traditionally, heart attacks and strokes have been associated with older age groups. So, as doctors advocating heart attack prevention, we focused on this narrow group. Public health policies separated this group and

devised pragmatic approaches to deal with this segment.

Today, this method is not only outdated but also dangerous. Now, without exception, the people living in heavily polluted areas of India are vulnerable to heart attacks. To make matters worse, it is not only heart attacks but also stroke (the number two killer of humankind) and cancers that will be attacking an entire population.

We have a crisis on our hands. Let us understand and tackle it. Let 2024 begin with a new approach to managing heart attacks amid their biggest risk factor: pollution.

Do the following scenarios appear familiar to you?

- 1) A 50-year-old farmer is awakened from sleep; he is clutching his chest in severe pain. By the time his wife summons the son, the patient has stopped breathing. He is no more — dead at a young age from a massive heart attack.
- 2) A 32-year-old engineer is rushed to a hospital; he is declared dead on arrival; a post-mortem detects a heart attack and evidence of drug use.
- 3) A 56-year-old housewife, overweight and with diabetes, had been complaining of chest pressure for two weeks. When it gets worse, she is taken to a hospital, where doctors find that she had a heart attack recently.

Let us use these three real-life cases to discuss the rapid-



**CHALLENGE:** A multi-pronged approach is required to reduce the impact of pollution. **PH**

ly rising incidence of heart attacks in India. There may be clues as to why heart attacks are on the rise among young people.

This public health crisis is exacerbated by two distinct but interconnected groups of factors: existing high-risk health conditions and the worsening impact of pollution. Understanding the nuances of these groups is crucial to addressing the growing challenge.

In India, these conditions are increasingly affecting the younger population. This shift is largely attributed to the high prevalence of metabolic syndrome — a cluster of conditions, including increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around

Without exception, the people living in heavily polluted areas of India are vulnerable to heart attacks.

the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels — which accelerates the development of atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease and, consequently, heart attacks and strokes.

The number of diabetics in India is among the highest in the world. It further complicates this picture. Diabetes is a significant risk factor for heart diseases and is a key contributor to the high incidence of heart-related ailments.

A disturbing global trend is the high incidence of heart attacks in women. Long understood as a disease that predominantly affects men, heart attacks are very common in women too. In fact, more women die from heart attacks than from all cancers

combined. Because of several cultural, social and financial reasons, heart attacks in women are ignored and there are longer delays in taking the affected women to a hospital.

The second group of factors worsening India's heart attack epidemic is pollution. Pollution acts as a universal risk factor, affecting not just individuals with pre-existing health conditions but also the entire population. Its wide-reaching impact makes pollution a more significant contributor to heart diseases than traditional factors.

For instance, the recent spike in heart attacks among teenagers in Gujarat and studies predicting a reduction in life expectancy by 10-12 years for residents of Delhi due to pollution underscore the impact of environmental factors on heart health.

Public health approaches in India now face the dual challenge of addressing the pre-existing epidemic of heart-related diseases and mitigating the effects of pollution. This compound problem requires an integrated approach, focusing on both individual health management and broader environmental policies.

Fortunately, advances in medical science offer a ray of hope. Primary angioplasty, also known as primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), has revolutionised the treatment of

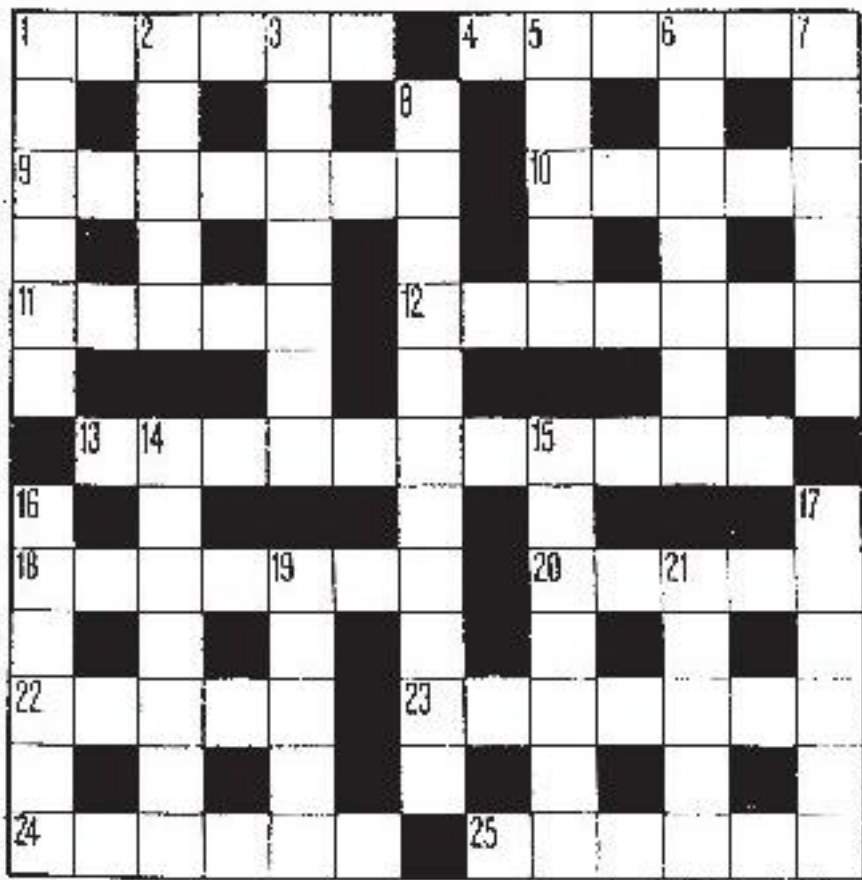
heart attacks. Available in most large hospitals, this emergency procedure is both effective and cost-efficient. Additionally, thrombolytics — drugs that dissolve clots — offer a viable alternative when angioplasty is not accessible.

However, the success of these methods of treatment hinges on early detection and prompt medical intervention. Recognising symptoms and seeking immediate care are critical, as is the availability of ambulances and 24-hour angioplasty services in larger hospitals. With these resources, the survival rate can exceed 95 per cent.

While medical interventions are crucial, long-term strategies focusing on risk factor modification are equally important. For patients with coronary artery disease, mitigating the risk of pollution poses the greatest challenge. This requires a multi-pronged approach, encompassing individual lifestyle changes, public health initiatives and environmental policies aimed at reducing pollution.

The heart attack epidemic in India is a complex problem compounded by the pervasive impact of pollution. By tackling the traditional risk factors as well as the challenge of pollution, India can hope to stem the tide of this epidemic and safeguard the heart health of its population.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 1 Repudiate (6)
- 4 Roman god of fire (6)
- 9 Wrath (7)
- 10 Frighten (5)
- 11 A culinary herb (5)
- 12 Playhouse (7)
- 13 Shift responsibility (4,3,4)
- 18 Pagan (7)
- 20 Auctioneer's hammer (5)
- 22 Contempt (5)
- 23 A level in a hierarchy (7)
- 24 Follow advice (6)
- 25 Assign (6)

### DOWN

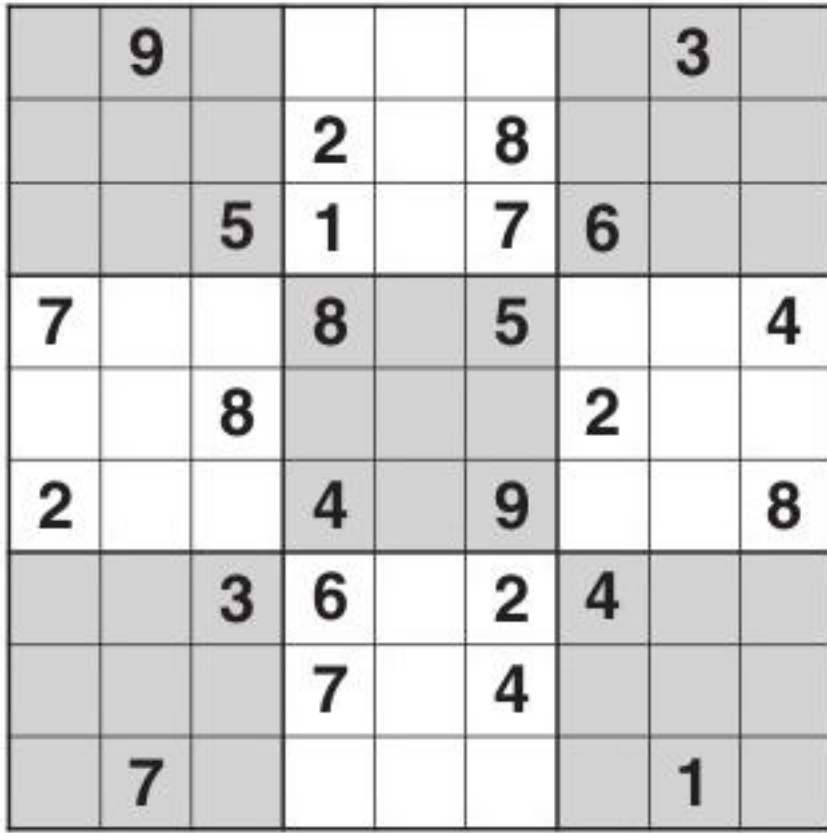
- 1 Second in command (6)
- 2 Disreputable (5)
- 3 Testimony (7)
- 5 Excessive (5)
- 6 Bitterly sarcastic (7)
- 7 Aspire (6)
- 8 Having obtained nothing (5,6)
- 14 Perplexed (2,1,4)
- 15 Important person (3,4)
- 16 Carpentry tool (6)
- 17 Base supporting statue (6)
- 19 For this reason (5)
- 21 Russia's principal river (5)

### SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

**Across:** 1 Cockpit, 5 Scrub, 8 Smooth-talking, 9 Ensure, 10 Harvest, 11 Squint, 12 Frayed, 15 Appease, 17 Album, 19 Pusillanimous, 20 Risky, 21 Nemesis.

**Down:** 1 Caste, 2 Cross-purposes, 3 Pattern, 4 Tetchy, 5 Solar, 6 Raise eyebrows, 7 Bigoted, 11 Scamper, 13 Realism, 14 Retain, 16 Alley, 18 Muses.

## SU DO KU



V. HARD

### SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

2	8	5	7	4	9	6	1	3
4	6	9	1	8	3	2	5	7
1	3	7	6	2	5	8	4	9
9	5	3	2	7	4	1	8	6
8	2	6	5	9	1	7	3	4
7	4	1	8	3	6	5	9	2
3	7	2	4	1	8	9	6	5
5	1	4	9	6	2	3	7	8
6	9	8	3	5	7	4	2	1

### CALENDAR

JANUARY 1, 2024, MONDAY		
■ Shaka Samvat	1945	
■ Posh Shaka	11	
■ Posh Parvishite	17	
■ Hijari	1445	
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 5, up to 2.29 pm		
■ Ayushman Yoga up to 4.35 am		
■ Magha Nakshatra up to 8.36 am		
■ Moon in Leo sign		
■ Gandmoola up to 8.36 am		

## FORECAST

CITY	MONDAY TUESDAY		17:33 HRS 07:19 HRS
	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	13	10	
New Delhi	18	10	
Amritsar	14	08	
Bathinda	18	08	
Jalandhar	14	07	
Ludhiana	15	08	
Bhiwani	18	08	
Hisar	17	07	
Sirsa	16	08	
Dharamsala	18	06	
Manali	14	01	
Shimla	15	04	
Srinagar	08	-03	
Jammu	18	08	
Kargil	06	-08	
Leh	04	-10	
Dehradun	24	06	
Mussoorie	14	05	

TEMPERATURE IN °C



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# Gangster Landa, fulcrum of narco-terror network, fomenting trouble in state

## At 34, Canada-based terrorist faces 33 cases | 71 associates arrested so far

JUPINDERJIT SINGH  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 31** With 33 criminal cases against him at the age of 34, designated terrorist Lakhbir Singh Sandhu, alias Landa, is the fulcrum of narco-terror-gangster network that is run from Canada with the help of Pakistan's ISI to foment trouble in Punjab.

As per the police dossier on him, the focus of Landa's group is on carrying out target killings and attacks on government establishments besides drug smuggling. As many as 71 of Landa's associates have been nabbed by the Punjab Police, making him one of the biggest organisers of crime in the state. From small weapons to rocket launchers and



Lakhbir Singh Sandhu, alias Landa

from extortion calls to smuggling of heavy consignments of heroin and other drugs, Landa's network has grown over the years.

A bachelor's in pharmacy, Landa had the first FIR against him over a street

THE MASTERMIND BEHIND RPG ATTACKS	
■ Involved in RPG attack on Punjab Police Intelligence HQs in Mohali on May 9, 2022	■ Amritsar on August 16, 2022
■ IED seized from his two aides by the Haryana STF in Shahabad (Kurukshetra) on August 4, 2022	■ Effected organised killing of a garment shop owner in Tarn Taran on October 11, 2022
■ Punjab Police arrested 15 others of the module affiliated with Landa and Satbir Singh, alias Satta	■ Behind RPG attack at Sarhali Kalan police station in Tarn Taran on December 10, 2022
■ Bid to plant IED in vehicle of Sub-Inspector Dilbag Singh in	■ In August 2023, NIA special court ordered confiscation of Landa's property
	■ In September, NIA declared reward of ₹10 lakh on Landa & ₹5 lakh each on his 3 aides

quarrel with a rival group of youths. Later on, he came in contact with hardened criminals and gangsters. He is now one of the most notorious partners of Pakistan-based gangster-turned terrorist Harvinder Singh

Sandhu, alias Rinda. A resident of Kiran near Hake in Tarn Taran, he is currently based in Alberta, Canada, he runs the pro-Khalaistan terror organisation Babbar Khalsa International (BKI). Landa fled to Canada on

June 22, 2015. His passport expired in 2020.

Before moving to Canada, he was involved in various cases, including murder, kidnapping, arms and drugs smuggling, in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Moga and Ferozepur districts. Besides, he was booked in Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

He along with Harvinder Singh Sandhu, alias Rinda, is operating narco-terror module. Along with their Indian associates, they both are involved in smuggling and selling narcotics, channelising proceeds of narcotics, raising funds through hawala, and sending arms, ammunition and explosives into Punjab with the intention to revive terrorism.



**BIG HAUL** The police with the seized drugs in Amritsar on Sunday.

## Amritsar cops bust drug, arms racket run from US

AMRITSAR, DECEMBER 31

The City police unearthed a drugs and arms racket being run by USA-based smuggler Manpreet Singh, alias Mannu Muhawa, with the arrest of two persons here today. Around 19 kg heroin, seven sophisticated weapons and Rs 23 lakh drug money were seized from them.

Those arrested were identified as Sandeep Singh, alias Laddi, of Guru Ki Wadali and Roshan of Haer village here. This is one of the major drug seizures in the city area over the past several years.

Amritsar Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said besides contraband and drug money, the police also seized three .30 bore pistols, three .32 bore pistol, one 9 mm Glock pistol, Pakistan-manufactured ammunition, a cash counting machine and some drone equipment from the accused. A Hyundai Verna car

19 kg heroin, 7 pistols, ₹23L seized | 2 arrested

(PB-06-BB-4064) being used to supply the heroin consignment was also impounded.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the accused were in touch with USA-based smuggler Mannu Muhawa and were supplying heroin across the state after smuggling it from Pakistan.

"Apart from investigating various linkages, the police teams are also trying to ascertain the financial trail," Bhullar said. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, Abhimanyu Rana said the CIA staff received reliable inputs that some associates of smugglers Mannu Mahawa had received a heroin consignment smuggled from Pakistan and that they were on way to deliver it to their accomplices. — TNS

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I, Channo, spouse of Kartar Singh resident of Chuharwal, Kapurthala, Punjab-144601 have change my name from Channo to Finnno vide Affidavit dated 21 Oct. 2023 before Executive Magistrate Kapurthala. (CL23093300)

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BSF and police personnel with the seized drone and heroin in Tarn Taran on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

## Robbers' gang busted in Bathinda, 9 arrested

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

BATHINDA, DECEMBER 31

The Bathinda police have busted a gang whose members would rob passers-by on the main road of the city at night by pretending to seek help.

A total of nine suspects, including five women, have been arrested by the police. The group's women would stand on the main road of the city at night and stop the passing commuters to seek help, after which their associates would show weapons and rob the said passers-by. A case has been registered against the suspects.

A police remand has been obtained for all the suspects from court. Assistant Sub-Inspector Nirmal Singh of the Kotwali police station said the police had received a tip-off that some men and women had formed a gang to rob people.

The women would stand on the road near Government Rajindra College at night and ask for help from pedestrians and commuters passing by.

When an innocent fell into their trap, the male members of the gang would come forward and accuse the victim of molesting the woman and

### MODUS OPERANDI OF SUSPECTS

- The women members of the alleged gang would stand on the road near Government Rajindra College at night and ask for help from pedestrians and commuters
- When a victim fell into their trap, the male members of the gang would come forward and accuse the victim of molesting the women and threaten to file a case against him
- They would flaunt their weapons, snatch money from the victim and flee the spot. The police said many people had been targeted by the gang

threaten to file a case against him. They would show them weapons, snatch money from the victim and flee the spot. The police said many people had been targeted by the gang. Assistant Sub-Inspector Nirmal Singh said on the basis of the tip-off, the police laid a trap last night and exposed the gang.

The arrested suspects have been identified as Paramjeet Kaur, Simran Kaur, Priya, Amanpreet Kaur, Raman-deep Kaur, Amandeep Singh, Lakha Singh, Himanshu Chauhan and Yuvraj Sunaria. Assistant Sub-Inspector Nirmal Singh added.

AMAN SOOD

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PATIALA, DECEMBER 31

Harcharan Singh Bhullar, a 2007-batch IPS officer, was today appointed as Deputy Inspector General (DIG), Patiala range, following the retirement of Additional DGP, Patiala, Mukhwinder Singh Chhina, an IPS officer of 1997 batch.

The government is yet to name a new officer following Chhina's retirement as the head of the SIT which was formed to probe the drugs case against SAD leader Bikram Majithia.

Talking to *The Tribune*, Bhullar, who will join his office on Monday, said his priority would be to ensure "more public participation against drugs and illegal activities" and seek cooperation of the people of Patiala, Sangrur, Malerkotla and Barnala for the prevention of drugs and crime.

"Periodical meetings of the entire Patiala range would be held for a fortnightly review with special emphasis to hold drug de-addiction camps to save the youth, who have fallen prey to drugs, while legal action would be taken against the drug smugglers and their aides", he stated.

Bhullar said as per the directions of Chief Minister

## BSF, cops seize heroin, drone in Tarn Taran

AMRITSAR, DECEMBER 31

The BSF along with the district police seized a drone and 523 gm heroin from a farm at Mari Kamboke village in the border belt of Tarn Taran today.

According to information, the BSF troops detected and intercepted a drone

from the Pakistan side that violated Indian airspace.

Subsequently, the BSF and the Tarn Taran police launched an intensive search operation that led to the seizure of a Pakistani drone (DJI Mavic 3 Classic, made in China) along with 523 gm heroin from a field. — TNS



Harcharan Singh Bhullar

### REVIEW EVERY FORTNIGHT

Review meetings of the entire Patiala range will be held every fortnight. Legal action will be taken against drug smugglers and their aides.

HS Bhullar, DIG, PATIALA RANGE

Bhagwant Mann, intensive monitoring would be conducted by the Patiala Police to curb the spread of crime and drugs. "The police will act as friends of people as they are also part of society. The police will always be at their service to make the district crime and anti-social activities free. Apart from this, the doors of his office are open to the general public and they can also come to him to resolve their problems," he added.

Before this posting, Harcharan Singh Bhullar has earlier served as DIG, PAP; Joint Director, Vigilance Bureau; and SSP, Jagraon (Ludhiana rural), Barnala, Sangrur, Fatehgarh Sahib, Khanna, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur and SAS Nagar. A seasoned cop, Bhullar comes with a lot of field experience.

Meanwhile, the government is yet to name new SIT head. In May 2023, the Punjab Government reconstituted

ed the special investigation team (SIT) probing a drugs case against Majithia. ADGP Chhina was named head of the SIT in place of DIG Rahul S. The first SIT was led by AIG Balraj Singh, who was replaced by Rahul S after AAP came to power.

However with Chhina's retirement, the Punjab government will now name a senior IPS officer as the new head of the SIT which already has a DIG and a DSP-level officer as its members. This is the third time the SIT will be recast to ensure that a challan is filed.

Earlier, Chhina-led SIT summoned Majithia and questioned him on Saturday. The FIR was registered at the state crime police station in Mohali on the basis of a 2018 report of the anti-drug special task force. Majithia has demanded the cancellation of the case saying the government was playing politics by neither submitting a challan nor cancelling the case.



Gurdaspur's Red Cross centre serves as rehabilitation facility for drug addicts. TRIBUNE PHOTO

HIGHS	LOWS
■ Kejriwal and CM Mann announced ₹1,854 crore developmental works	■ Despite best efforts, flights of Pakistani drones carrying heroin continue
■ Strict vigil by police, BSF near wire-fencing kept check on intrusion, drugs	■ Medical college & hospital in Gurdaspur remains a distant dream
■ Sugarcane farmers elated after mills' crushing capacity increased	■ Sugarcane research institute set up in Kalanaur remains a non-starter

## Gurdaspur continued to grapple with rampant drug abuse, drone sightings

RAVI DHALIWAL

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

GURDASPUR, DECEMBER 31

Pakistan's insatiable fetish for pushing in drones carrying payloads of narcotics into Dorangla, the significant increase in the use of heroin among the youth, the ascendancy of two Congress leaders on the political firmament of the state, the unbridled powers given by AAP to its halqa in charges and the lackadaisical approach of MP Sunny Deol to the affairs of his constituency remained the talking points in 2023.

The year showed a marked shift in the dynamics of dope

### LOOKING BACK 2023

use. Plant based drugs like opium and poppy were replaced by heroin. The use of this drug is considered to be "classy and chic" by the youth. This swing is because of the comparatively easy availability of the white powder, courtesy Pakistani drones. BSF officers say their counterparts, Pakistani Rangers, have established new pickets which are barely a stone's throw from Dorangla block. All

drone flights are remote-controlled from these pickets.

BSF had installed an anti-drone device on a trial basis near the border. The mechanism neutralised the flying machines and Dorangla heaved a sigh of relief. The moment the device was dismantled, the drones again started flying here, there and everywhere.

Officers admit that for every one kg of heroin they confiscate, at least five to 10 kg is pushed into Gurdaspur, unabated and unchecked. A major part of the drug is consumed in this district itself before the

shipment moves into Delhi, Goa and Mumbai. Needless to say, heroin remains the No. 1 talking point because of the misery and wretchedness it is causing to the families of the addicts. So easy has it become to procure heroin that Indian smugglers just have to send a message through social media sites to their Pakistani contacts. Lo and behold, a drone appears, drops the consignment and flies away. The packets are later collected by smugglers while payment to the Pakistani smugglers is made through hawala.



# Will provide horticulture implements at cheaper rates from today, says CM

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, DECEMBER 31** Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said the state government would offer quality horticulture equipment, fertilisers and pesticides at affordable rates through Himachal Pradesh Horticulture Produce Marketing and Processing Corporation (HPMC) from January 1.

Emphasising the government's commitment, he said the HPMC had reduced its profit margin from 15 per cent to 9 per cent, enabling apple growers to access quality products at more economical prices.

Furthermore, the HPMC has inked 38 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for direct purchases from original manufacturing companies, striving to offer farmers vital items at low rates. "Our government is committed to



TO MODIFY EXISTING SCHEMES

■ Chief Minister said his government was aiming to increase the income of horticulturists in the state. The Horticulture Department would suitably modify the existing schemes and make them more effective through appropriate restructuring

■ He said the government made provisions in its first budget for establishing an online system to facilitate procurement of horticulture produce at minimum support price by the HPMC

■ Sukhu assured the growers of introducing universal cartons to streamline the sale of apples in the upcoming season

◀ CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu addresses mediapersons in Shimla.

supporting apple growers and the decision to reduce margins reflects our dedication to uplifting the horticultural community and enhancing the economic wellbeing of apple growers in Himachal as our top priority," he said.

He said his government was aiming to increase the income of the horticulturists in the state. The Horticulture

Department would suitably modify the existing schemes and make them more effective through appropriate restructuring, he added.

He said the government made provisions in its first budget for an online system to be established to facilitate procurement of horticulture produce at minimum support price by the HPMC.

"This online facility will also be available for booking the CA stores of the HPMC. Apart from the sale of produce from home, the farmers will also be able to book farm equipment and materials sold by HPMC," he said.

He further said that grading/packing houses, CA and cold stores would be set up in association with FPOs in

Bhavanagar in Kinnaur, Sandasu near Chirgaon, Anu in Jubbil, Chopal in Shimla, Jabli of Solan district, Sundernagar in Mandi, Duttanagar near Rampur Bushehar and Kharapathar in Shimla.

Looking ahead, he assured the growers that the sale of apple in the upcoming season would be streamlined into universal cartons.

# Upper Shimla engulfed in smoke amid orchard fires

Set off by apple growers to dispose of garden waste

SUBHASH RAJTA

**SHIMLA, DECEMBER 31** Rampant orchard fires have left the upper Shimla area under a thick cover of smoke. As the apple growers are burning orchard waste like twigs and leaves, thick plumes of smoke can be seen rising from every nook and corner of the apple belt.



Plumes of smoke seen emanating from orchard waste. FILE

Even as the burning of waste is an annual affair, the situation this time seems to be more serious. "Despite the efforts to dissuade apple growers from burning orchard waste, the fires this time appears to have increased. The situation is similar to what it is in Punjab and Haryana at the time of stubble burning," said Sanjeev Thakur, president of the Chuwara Apple Valley Society, Chirgaon. "The visibility has dropped significantly due to the thick veil of smoke. We can't see beyond a few hundred metres now," he said.

The surge in the number of fires has come despite the orders from the Rohru SDM that the growers found burning their orchard waste would be penalised under Section 133 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

"We have already issued notices to growers who set their orchard waste on fire. They have apologised and have given an undertaking in writing that they wouldn't do it again," said Sunny Sharma, SDM, Rohru. "However, it's not possible to issue notice to each and every grower as the number is very large. So, we are also focusing on raising awareness against this practice and adverse impact it

## CANT ISSUE NOTICE TO EVERY GROWER

“It's not possible to issue notice to each and every grower as the number is very high. So, we are also focusing on raising awareness against this practice and the adverse impact it will have on our environment and health.”

Sunny Sharma, ROHRU SDM

## WARNING FAILS TO YIELD RESULTS

- The surge in the number of fires has come despite the orders from the Rohru SDM that the growers found burning their orchard waste would be penalised under Section 133 of the Criminal Procedure Code
- Progressive growers feel these fires will adversely affect the micro climate of the area and apple production as the temperature will rise, which will make it tough to get the required chilling hours for apple trees

would have on our environment and health," said Sharma, adding that forest fires have worsened the situation. Meanwhile, progressive growers feel these fires will adversely affect the micro climate of the area and apple production. "Due to these fires, the temperature will rise, which will make it tough to get the required chilling hours for apple trees," said Lokinder

Bisht, president of the Progressive Growers Association. With awareness drives not yielding the desired results, growers feel that the government and Horticulture Department should offer subsidy on shredding machine. "If the shredder is subsidised, it may encourage the growers to turn waste into manure by composting it," said Thakur.

# Planting material from Kashmir to be under strict scanner

Horticulture Dept taking steps to detect, prevent spread of Apple Leaf Blotch Miner pest

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, DECEMBER 31** Following the detection and spread of Apple Leaf Blotch Miner pest in Kashmir, the Department of Horticulture here has decided to strengthen the monitoring of the planting material coming from Kashmir.

"The employee of the Horticulture Department will be present on entry points to the state to check the planting material coming from Kashmir and Uttarakhand. No planting material will be

APPLE GROWERS WELCOME MOVE

“Ensuring that we get pest and disease-free planting material is the need of the hour. There's a big threat of new diseases entering our orchards if the planting material is not checked for pests, fungal and viral diseases before being planted in the orchards.”

Harish Chauhan, CONVENER, SANYUKT KISAN MANCH

allowed into the state without proper documents and certification," said Senior Plant Protection Officer Kirti Sinha.

"And even if someone manages to sneak in the planting material illegally, it will be destroyed as and when found

by the department. We have made flying squads in each district for this purpose," he said.

According to Sinha, a large amount of planting material comes to the state from Kashmir and the Apple Leaf Blotch Miner pest could easily travel

here with the "illegal planting material". "The pest has caused substantial damage in certain part of Kashmir. It eats up chlorophyll in the leaves. We will ensure no planting material from the affected areas, and without the required documentation and certification is brought into the state," said Sinha.

Wary about the growing number of diseases over the last few years, apple growers have welcomed the move. "Ensuring that we get pest and disease-free planting material is the need of the hour. There's

a big threat of new diseases entering our orchards if the planting material is not checked for pests, fungal and viral diseases before being planted in the orchards," said Harish Chauhan, convener of the Sanyukt Kisan Manch.

He further said the government and the horticulture department should be equally strict with regard to the planting material coming from

Meanwhile, the department has also urged growers to not buy planting material from nurseries not registered with the department.



Tourists enjoy music on Mall Road in Manali on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

# Tourists brave biting cold in Manali to welcome 2024

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**MANDI, DECEMBER 31** New Year celebrations kick-started at Manali early this evening, with the Mall Road witnessing a large number of tourists. As the Manali administration had set up a DJ music system on the Mall Road, tourists were seen dancing and making merry despite the bone-chilling cold. Hoteliers, too, had made arrangements of music for revellers.



Vehicles line up in Manali on New Year's Eve. PTI

- OCCUPANCY LOW, RUE HOTELIERS
- Shimla hoteliers claim that the hotel occupancy rate was just around 60-70 per cent in Shimla on Sunday. "This occupancy rate is quite low, considering it's the last night of the year," said Mohinder Seth, president of the Shimla Hotels and Tourism Stakeholders' Association

■ Seth alleges that the unauthorised homestays and bed and breakfast facilities in and around Shimla are hitting the hoteliers hard. "A large chunk of tourists opt for these accommodations due to lower tariff," he said.

■ Hoteliers in Manali were also slightly disappointed as the tourist rush for New Year celebrations was much less as compared to Christmas. Hem Raj Sharma, a hotelier in Manali, said, "Traffic jams in Manali and its surrounding areas were widely reported, which had an adverse impact on tourist arrival."

in Manali to enjoy the Winter Carnival, which will kick start on January 2. "It will be a five-day event, which will

conclude on January 6. During the event, different cultural and sports activities will be organised."

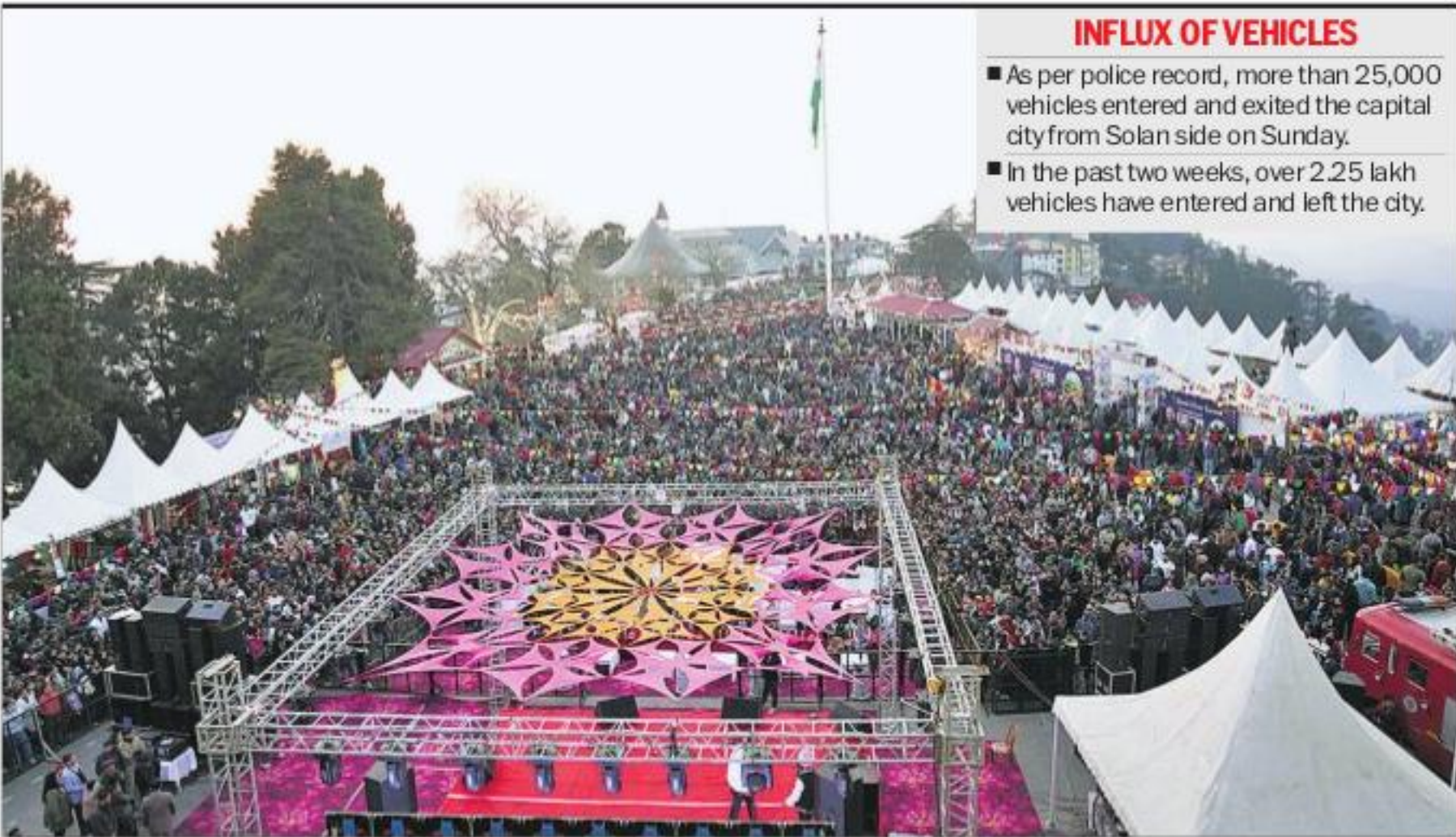
# Thousands throng Shimla to ring in New Year

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, DECEMBER 31** Thousands of tourists thronged Shimla to ring in the New Year on Sunday. As tourist vehicles kept entering the city till late evening, police personnel were on their toes throughout.

As per police record, more than 25,000 vehicles entered and exited the capital city from Solan side on Sunday. In the past two weeks, more than 2.25 lakh vehicles have entered and left the city. Thousands of tourists, who reached the Mall Road and The Ridge during evening hours, were seen enjoying the Winter Carnival.

In order to manage the traffic movement, the district police have been halting vehicles coming from Solan side to Shimla at the Shoghi barrier for a few minutes. The traffic plan worked well as city did not get choked despite heavy rush, claimed the police authorities.



A huge rush of tourists on The Ridge; and (below) artists present folk dance and music during the Winter Carnival in Shimla on Sunday.

Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Gandhi said, "We have been managing traffic movement in and out of the city in a regulated manner. It's based on mathematical calculations. Considering the increased number of tourist vehicles entering Shimla for Christmas and New Year celebrations as per the existing road network and available parking capacity (4,500 vehicles), we are halting vehicles for some time near the Shoghi barrier and then releasing them in a regulated manner. It would be absolute chaos if we let all vehicles pass at one go."

Gandhi added, "At 13 bottlenecks, where a multiple dimension vehicular flow is being managed, like the Victory Tunnel, the capacity of disposal of vehicular flow is 35 to 40 vehicles per minute whereas the arrival of vehicles on these points is more than 55 to 60 vehicles per minute. So to equalise this number, Shimla police regulates traffic on the rotation of one minute on temporary hold barriers which are 10 to 15 km outside the city."

- GRAND FINALE TO WINTER CARNIVAL
- On the last day of the Shimla Winter Carnival, cultural troupes from Chamba, Shimla, Kullu and Sirmour districts enthralled tourists with their performances

■ The Naag cultural group from Chamba performed Gaddi dance. Artists also performed Kullavi nati. Punjab's NZCC, Patiala, members performed bhanga

■ A cultural parade with traditional musical instruments was also held



## CM visits Mall Road, interacts with public

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, DECEMBER 31** CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, accompanied by his cabinet colleagues, took a stroll on the Mall Road, Shimla, and extended warm greetings to the public and

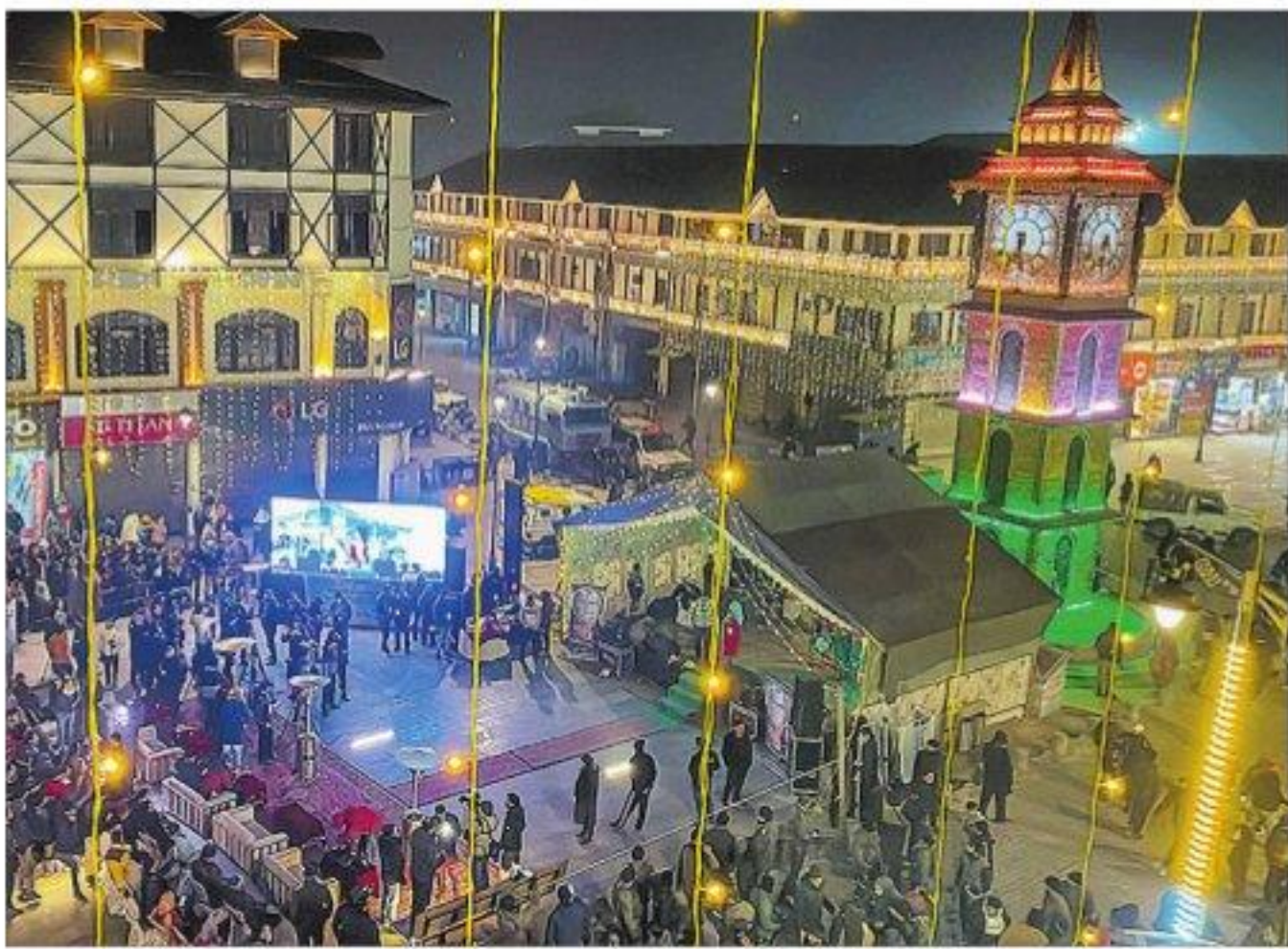
tourists on New Year's Eve on Sunday. The CM also visited the Winter Carnival at The Ridge and enjoyed the cultural programme. Sukhu said, "The government was promoting tourism activities in grand way and organised the Winter Carnival in Shimla for

the first time." He thanked the people for their invaluable support during the recent natural calamity in the state. He said that with the collaborative efforts of the people and the state government, Himachal was now ready to welcome tourists.

## GOV EXTENDS WISHES

Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla and CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday greeted people on the eve of the New Year. The Governor expressed hope that the New Year would bring abundance of good health and happiness to the lives of the people. Sukhu wished for joy and prosperity to the people in 2024.





Braving chill, New Year revellers throng the Lal Chowk in Srinagar on Sunday. PTI

## Minimum temp several notches below freezing point across Valley

**SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 31** Kashmir reeled under cold wave conditions on Sunday as the minimum temperatures across the Valley stayed several degrees below the freezing point, officials said here. The minimum temperature in the summer capital Srinagar dropped to -3.4 degrees Celsius from the previous night's -2.8 degrees Celsius, they said.

Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district which serves as a base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra recorded a minimum temperature of -3.4 degrees Celsius, up from the previous night's -4.1 degrees Celsius.

Gulmarg, the famous ski-resort in Baramulla, recorded a low of -3.5 degrees Celsius, down from -2.5 degrees Celsius the previous night. Qazigund recorded a low of -2.6 degrees Celsius, Koker-nag town -1.4 degrees Celsius and Kupwara -3.8 degrees Celsius.

There was some snowfall and rains in Kashmir during December which result-



Tourists enjoy sleigh ride in Gulmarg on Sunday. ANI

ed in the prolonged cold wave conditions. Kashmir is under the grip of the 40-day harsh winter period 'Chilla-i-Kalan'. The chances of snowfall are the highest during this period and most areas, especially the higher reaches, receive heavy snow. 'Chilla-i-Kalan' will end on January 31.

However, the cold condition will continue even after that with a 20-day 'Chilla-i-Khurd' and a 10-day 'Chilla-

i-Bachha'. The minimum temperature was -9.2 degrees Celsius in Leh town of Ladakh. Meanwhile, the New Year revellers may have to do without the traditional snowfall this year as the cold wave and dense fog sweep across Kashmir with little prospect of any fresh snowfall.

The Meteorological Department, Srinagar, said the weather was likely to remain cold and dry. — Agencies

## Up to ₹12.5 lakh announced for info on terror activities

ARJUN SHARMA

**JAMMU, DECEMBER 31** In the wake of rising terror activities across Jammu and Kashmir, the police have announced cash rewards and also issued a list of senior police officials, urging people to contact them to provide information on terrorists, trans-border tunnel, drones and other terror activities.

A statement issued by the J&K Police mentioned that people can share such information with district SSPs. The identity of the person will be kept secret.

The cash rewards range from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 12.50 lakh, depending on the nature of the information. Rs 5 lakh has been announced for information on trans-border tunnels used by terrorists for intrusion and transporting explosives and contraband consignments.

### DEPENDS ON NATURE OF INFORMATION

- ₹5 lakh:** Information on trans-border tunnels used by terrorists to bring in explosives, contraband.
- ₹3 lakh:** Drone from across the border dropping narcotics and explosive material or receiver of the consignment.
- ₹2 lakh:** People in contact with terrorists or handlers from across the border or any agent within Jammu & Kashmir.
- ₹1 lakh:** People in mosques, madrassas, schools or colleges encouraging or inciting others to join terror ranks.

Rs 3 lakh will be given to those see drone flown from across the border to drop narcotics and explosive material and the information leads to recovery of the same. Similar amount will be given if someone provides actionable intelligence

about a person connected with receiving drones, deliveries or transporting arms to the hinterland or Punjab.

Rs 2 lakh will be given for giving information about persons in communication with terrorists or handlers from across the border or with any agent within J&K. Rs 1 lakh has been announced for those who give information about people in mosques, madrassas, schools or colleges who are encouraging, inducing and inciting people to join terrorism or to pick up guns. Rs 2 lakh to Rs 12.50 lakh has been announced for giving information about the presence of terrorists, resulting in successful operation leading to arrests or encounter. The reward will be provided as per the category of terrorists about whom the information is provided. There are three categories of terrorists,

including A, B and C.

The police are facing criticism from people in different districts of the UT due to the increased terror incidents which are not detected by the intelligence unit of the police.

There are apprehensions that many terrorists have been sneaking in through the Line of Control and the international border without getting detected by the Army and the Border Security Force (BSF) and have been committing terror acts in the hinterland in the jurisdiction of J&K police.

Many Pakistan-trained terrorists have been killed in Rajouri and Poonch district of Jammu division this year, which suggests that they were able to enter the Indian territory from the LoC in these twin districts. Smuggling of narcotics and arms also increased through drones during the year.

## Minister inspects river project

**JAMMU, DECEMBER 31** Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Sunday carried out an on-site review of the Devika rejuvenation project in Udhampur. He inspected the finishing touches in progress on the completion of Rs 190 crore centrally funded project. Built on the lines of Namami Gange, the project was launched by the Prime Minister in 2019.

The minister said, "There has been a long pending demand for renovation, rejuvenation and beautification, but none of the earlier governments paid any heed."

Besides a liquid waste management project, a solid waste management project will also be taken up under the Devika rejuvenation project.

He directed officials of the PWD (R&B) and the Municipal Council, Udhampur, for ensuring dedicated feeder for uninterrupted power supply, besides maintaining cleanliness and beautification of the 'ghat' area. He also said the year 2023 had been historic for India on many fronts. — OC

## Punjab refuses to send...

**FROM PAGE 1** Lala Lajpat Rai, Udhampur Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Mai Bhago and Ghadari Babe didn't need any "no-objection certificate from the BJP to prove their national standing". "We will not allow Punjab to figure on the list of rejected states, which are being given a chance to display their valuable separately, thereby getting second-class treatment. Punjab is capable of paying worthy tributes to its heroes and showcasing their legacy independently," said Mann. The Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, issued a statement clarifying that the tableaux of Punjab, Delhi and West Bengal were not included in the Republic Day parade as these were not aligned with the broader themes adopted

this year for the event. Their criticism on not being selected for the parade is unfounded," the communication read.

Thirty states and UTs, including Punjab, West Bengal and Delhi, had shown interest to participate in the parade. As is the norm, nearly half of them were selected. The Punjab tableau was shortlisted for the parade six times over the past eight years between 2017 and 2022, the communication read.

The issue took an ugly turn after Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar maintained that the tableau was rejected as the state government insisted on carrying pictures of CM Mann and Aam Aadmi Party convener Arvind Kejriwal on the tableau. The charge has been denied as "baseless" by Mann.

## Year on, families await justice in Dhangri terrorist attack case

ARJUN SHARMA

**JAMMU, DECEMBER 31** It was exactly a year ago when Saroj Bala lost both her sons — Deepak and Prince — in a dastardly terrorist attack in Dhangri village of Rajouri district on January 1, 2023. Members of the Hindu community were selectively targeted by the terrorists who shot dead five persons while two children were killed in an explosion caused by an IED planted by the terrorists the following day. Saroj Bala still believes that someone from inside the village helped the terrorists by providing them information about their houses. "How else can the terrorists come and attack the houses of Hindu community members?" questions Bala.

She alleges that the police haven't worked effectively on the case to trace the local link. Bala also has a complaint that the district administration hasn't provided a small piece of land where a memorial of the seven killed in terror attack can be built. "I had requested the district administration about a small piece of land near the main road where people can remember how seven children of our village were killed by terrorists. I had even offered my land in the village in lieu of the land near the road. I can build the memorial even on my land in the village but people will not come here to see the memorial," claims Saroj Bala.

Tears still roll down her eyes at the sight of the photo of her two sons. Local resi-



Saroj Bala shows photos of her sons killed by ultras in Dhangri.

LOCAL LINK 'MISSING'	SUCCESS SO FAR
Saroj Bala, who lost her two sons during the attack in Dhangri village on January 1 last year, alleges someone from the village helped the terrorists in identifying the houses of Hindus and the police couldn't trace that person. That's how terrorists targeted houses of only her community, she adds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ LeT commander Quari, said to be the mastermind behind the Dhangri attacks, was killed in an encounter in Kalakote of Rajouri on November 23.</li><li>■ In September, the NIA caught two Poonch residents for "harbouring" the terrorists involved in the Dhangri killings.</li></ul>

dents, along with mediapersons, do visit her from time to time. She has although not lost hope of justice but says that on January 20 a yearly ritual of her sons will be performed after which she will "do something no one has imagined". She does not disclose what she will do. "It is important that the police and the administration should listen to our demands. We had to sacrifice our children because of the failure of the police and they are not even able to arrest the real culprits who directed the terrorists towards our houses," says

Bala. The villagers will hold a remembrance event for all the seven lives lost in the attack on Monday.

A top LeT commander, identified as Quari, who is said to be the mastermind behind the Dhangri terror attacks, was killed in an encounter in Kalakote of Rajouri on November 23. In September, the NIA had claimed they arrested two Poonch residents in connection with Dhangri terror attack. Nissar Ahmad and Mushtaq Hussain of Gursai, Poonch, allegedly harboured the terrorists involved in the Dhangri killings.

## ISRO to ring...

**FROM PAGE 1** new area. In October, it had successfully launched the Gaganyaan Test Vehicle D1 mission. Talks are currently on with the United States, Russia and France for assistance in human flights in space.

The XpoSat will carry two payloads, both provided by indigenous institutions. The primary payload is POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-Rays), which is designed to measure polarimetry parameters by Raman Research Institute, while secondary is XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing), built by the UR Rao Satellite Centre. Both institutes are based in Bengaluru.

## House, car attached for harbouring ultras

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**JAMMU, DECEMBER 31** The Baramulla police on Sunday attached a residential house and a car of an accused for allegedly providing logistic support to terrorists. "Continuing its crackdown on harbouring terrorists and providing logistic support to them, the police have attached a residential house and a vehicle under Sections of 25 UAP (Act in Baramulla," the police mentioned in an official statement.

During the investigation of a case, the car bearing registration number CH01AD-9588 was seized as the said



Officials paste attachment notice on a car at Wanigam Payeen.

vehicle was used for transportation of illegal arms and ammunition from one place to another for militant activities. "Therefore, in pursuance of powers under Section 25 of UAP (Act, DSP

Special Investigation Unit, Baramulla, investigation officer of the case, attached the said property falling within the ambit of proceeds of militancy after obtaining approval from competent

authority," the police said.

"Similarly, during the investigation of another case under Section 307 of the IPC, Sections 7, 27 of the Arms Act and Sections 16, 18, 19, 20 and 38 of the UAP (Act) by the Kreeri police, the house of Farooq Ahmad Bhat, a resident of Wanigam Payeen, was attached as the said house was used for harbouring militants. Therefore, in pursuance of powers under Section 25 of the UAPA, Khalid Ashraf, DSP Operations, Kreeri, attached the said residential house falling within the ambit of proceeds of militancy after obtaining approval from competent authority," the official said.

## Tehreek-e-Hurriyat banned for 5 years

rule," Shah posted on X. He said, "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, any individual or organisation found involved in anti-India activities will be thwarted forthwith." The organisation has been involved in fomenting terrorism and anti-India propaganda for fuelling secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir, which is prejudicial to the sovereignty, security and integrity of India.

Many criminal cases have been registered against this organisation under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act, RPC and IPC.

The TeH was previously led by the late Syed Ali Shah Geelani and succeeded by Masarat Alam Bhat. Bhat, currently incarcerated, also headed the banned organisation, Muslim League of Jammu and Kashmir, which was declared unlawful earlier in December. —TNS

## India's self-confidence soaring, momentum...

T-20 World Cup is very inspiring. The achievements of players in many other sports added to the glory of the country. Now, the Paris Olympics will be held in 2024, for which the whole country is encouraging her players," he said.

Modi said India's ranking in Global Innovation Hub had improved from 81 in 2015 to 40 in 2023.

"This year, the number of patents filed in India was high, of which about 60% were from domestic funds. This time the highest number of Indian universities have been included in the QS Asia University Rankings," he said.

The PM said mental health was key to the Fit India campaign, adding Artificial Intelligence was being used to address mental health issues.

Explaining the uses of AI in translation, he recalled during the Kashi-Tamil

Sangamam event, saying AI tool "Bhashini" was employed for the first time. Through this innovative tool, the audience from Tamil Nadu could simultaneously listen to the Tamil version of the PM's speech delivered in Hindi.

Asking people to share creations on Ram Temple, the PM said: "People are expressing their feelings in a multitude of ways. During the past few days, many new songs and new bhajans have been composed on Lord Ram and Ayodhya. Many people are also writing new poems. It seems the art world is becoming a participant in this historic moment in its own unique style. Could we all share all such creations with a common hashtag? This compilation will turn into a flow of emotions and devotion in which everyone will be imbued with the ethos of Ram."

## India ramps up security in Arabian Sea as US...

adding some 10 days of additional travel between India and Europe. India's vast volume of crude supplies, however, will not be impacted as these originate from the Persian Gulf. Most large shipping firms in the past fortnight have stopped using the Bab el-Mandeb Red Sea route. Maersk, one of the world's largest shipping companies, on Sunday suspended the passage of its vessels through the Red Sea for 48 hours after one of its ships (Maersk Hangzhou) was attacked by Yemeni rebels. The firm

had earlier suspended operations for 48 hours on December 15 after similar attacks.

The US Central Command gave out information on the latest attack saying the Maersk vessel was under attack by four small Iranian-backed Houthi boats. Originating from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, the boats attacked the vessel and their crew even tried to board it. The US Navy carrier USS Eisenhower and destroyer USS Gravely responded to the distress call and launched helicop-

ters. "The small boats fired upon the US helicopters, which retaliated in self-defence, sinking three of the four boats and killing the crew. The fourth boat fled. There was no damage to United States personnel or equipment," the US Central Command said.

In continuation of the same incident, the USS Gravely shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen toward the vessel. "This is the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international vessels since

November 19," the Central Command said.

The Indian Navy said "it had substantially enhanced maritime surveillance efforts in central and north Arabian Sea and augmented force levels". "Two separate task groups have been created, which comprise warships, Predator drones and long-range maritime patrol aircraft. Each of the warships carry surface-to-air missiles to tackle air threats and also have BrahMos, in case a 300-km plus target has to be engaged," it said.

## Panagariya...

recommendations on the allocation of certain revenue resources between the Centre and the state governments. It also defines the financial relations between the Centre and the states. A notification issued on Sunday spelt out three main terms of reference for the Finance Commission. The first is the distribution between the Union and the states of the net proceeds of taxes and the allocation between the states of their respective shares of such proceeds.

Second, it should recommend the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the states out of the Consolidated Fund of India and the sums to be paid to the states by grants-in-aid of their revenues.

And, finally the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a state to supplement the resources of the panchayats and municipalities on the basis of the recommendations made by state Finance Commissions.

## Living near power plant for 40 years, locals to shift..

one of its members is not suffering from respiratory or skin disease, said a villager and former block samiti member, Surrender Kalia. The district administration now plans to shift the villagers 2 km away to Shoda-

pur, which will be renamed as "New Khukhrain" village.

Kalia said he and several other villagers met the officials concerned a number of times, and even met Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar in 2017 over the matter

before the assurance came from the district administration. The draw for plots was completed in 2018.

Deputy Commissioner Virender Kumar Dahiya said the delay had resulted due to the construction of roads and

the work on supply of electricity and water.

Four chaupals, a community centre and two anganwaris have been set up at the new site, while 80 per cent of the road work has been completed, he said.



To fight Naxals, 3,000 CAPF personnel to move from Odisha to Chhattisgarh

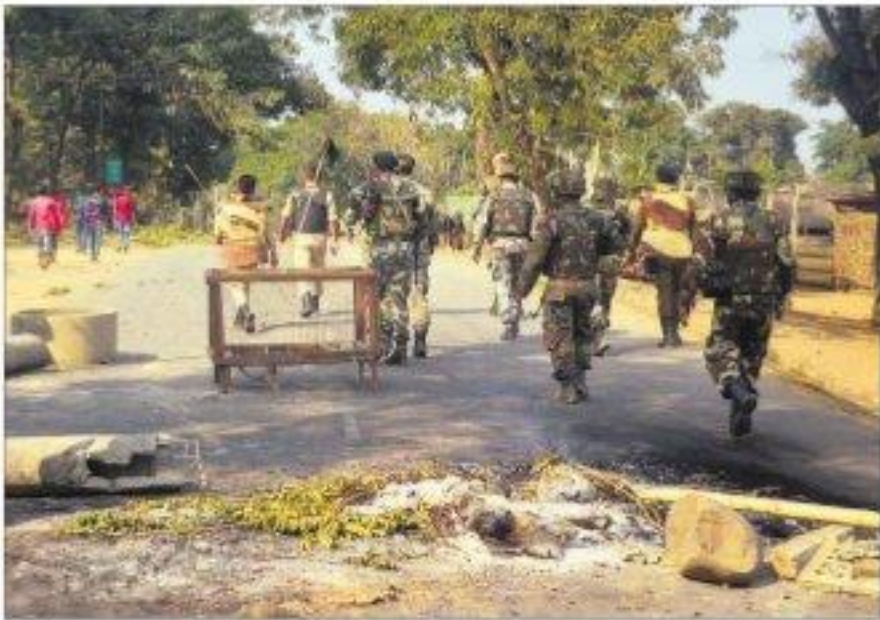
After ULFA, 3 Naga groups unite for talks with Centre

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31 Three battalions of the BSF comprising more than 3,000 personnel, will move across the border from Odisha to Chhattisgarh and an equal number of ITBP units will further move into the Naxal stronghold of Abujhmad as part of a strategy to intensify anti-Maoist operations in their last bastions, official sources said.

The new operational blueprint is part of a plan under which Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently made a declaration that India was “on the verge of” eliminating Left-wing extremism (LWE).

“The last strike against LWE by forces such as the BSF, CRPF and the ITBP is in the process. We are determined to end Naxalism,” Shah had said on December 1 in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, while addressing BSF troops on their 59th Raising Day.

Sources in the security establishment said the BSF had been directed to create



ITBP units plan to storm Naxal stronghold of Abujhmad as part of a strategy to eliminate last bastions of insurgents. PTI

six new company operating bases in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district by initially moving one of its battalions based in Odisha's Malkangiri, just across the interstate border.

A BSF battalion has a strength of over 1,000 personnel. The ITBP, which currently has about eight battalions located in Narayanpur, Rajnandgaon and Konda-

at present, has no permanent central or state police base and armed Maoist cadres are stated to be operating, training and moving here from across the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border in the south Bastar region.

The Bastar region comprising districts like Dantewada, Sukma and Bijapur up to Narayanpur and Kondagaon, and Kanker district further north is the last bastion and corridor where Maoists have some strength and can spring surprises against the security forces and the administration.

The security forces are building their new strength and infrastructure here to demolish the Maoist network and hold the area so that development works can be initiated by the state government, a senior officer said.

He said two more BSF and ITBP battalions each would be later moved to further dominate the

DIMAPUR, DECEMBER 31 Three Naga groups have come together and decided to pursue negotiations for a solution to the decades-old Naga political issue with the Centre jointly.

The decision was taken on Saturday during a meeting attended by leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) led by Akato Chophy, NSCN led by Khango and Z Royim-led Naga National Council (NNC). All three are splinter groups. The pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) on Friday signed a peace accord with the Centre and Assam Government.

“The three groups have come together to have a joint political venture in 2024,” said Akato, while addressing journalists after the meeting here in the presence of leaders of the other two groups.

Asked if they have already approached the Centre with

**JOINT EFFORT**

“We have made separate approaches in the past but now we will make a joint effort on the Naga issue.”

Akato Chophy, NSCN LEADER

their decision to hold a dialogue, he said, “We have made separate approaches in the past but now we will make a joint effort on the Naga issue.”

Akato also affirmed that they would be holding a dialogue separate from the negotiations being held by the working committee of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) with the Centre.

The NNPG is composed of only seven groups while other Naga groups have been left out, he said, announcing that the three groups welcome like-minded organisations to join them for the cause of the Nagas.

Stating that there was no nomenclature for the three

groups who have come together, Akato said they would approach the Centre for political talks.

The Nagaland insurgency is the longest-running conflict in the country. The Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the NNPGs since 2017.

The NSCN-IM has remained adamant on its demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas as well as integration of Naga-inhabited areas spread over four states of India — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, and also Myanmar.

On the other hand, the working committee of the NNPGs has expressed its willingness to accept whatever is granted for now and continue with the talks.

Nonetheless, as of now, there is no significant development in the political negotiations between Centre and the Naga groups. — PTI

Vice Admiral Srinivas is Southern Naval Command chief

KOCHI, DECEMBER 31 Vice Admiral V Srinivas took charge as the 30th Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOCINC) of the Southern Naval Command in a ceremonial parade at the naval base here on Sunday.

He succeeded Vice Admiral MA Hampiholi, who retired after a distinguished four-decade career in the Navy. Both Vice Admiral Srinivas and his predecessor paid homage at the Vendurthy War memorial, laying floral wreaths in a solemn ceremony honouring those who sacrificed their lives for the nation. — PTI

Derailed



A truck carrying a train coach collides with a railing on Lohia bridge in Bhagalpur, Bihar. PTI

Those who did injustice to society now thinking of 'Nyay Yatra': Nadda

LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 31 Targeting the Congress, BJP president JP Nadda on Sunday said those who spared no effort in doing injustice to society were now thinking about holding a 'Nyay Yatra'.

Addressing a public gathering here, Nadda also hit out at the opposition INDIA bloc, saying it was bent on dragging the country down while Prime Minister Narendra Modi was taking it forward.

Nadda was here to participate in the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', which aims to spread the word about the central government's flagship schemes ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He also flagged off a half-marathon for women.

“Those people who spared no effort to break India over the last so many years had set out on Bharat Jodo Yatra. Those people who spared no effort in doing injustice to society are thinking about holding a 'nyay yatra' these days. Those people who never thought of anyone out-



BJP national president JP Nadda and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurate half marathon in Lucknow. ANI

side their family are talking about the country today,” the BJP chief said.

Last week, the Congress announced it would hold from January 14 a 'Bharat Nyay Yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi from Manipur to Mumbai, passing through 14 states. The exercise is being seen as the party's attempt to rally support ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Targeting the INDIA bloc, which also includes the Con-

Military exercise 'Desert Cyclone' begins tomorrow

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31 The Joint Military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024' between India & the UAE will be held from January 2 to January 15 in Rajasthan.

The joint drills under 'Desert Cyclone 2024' will aim to enhance interoperability by learning and sharing best practices in urban operations.

Taking to its official handle on X, the Indian Army posted, “Exercise #DesertCyclone 2024. The Inaugural edition of Joint Military Exercise #DesertCyclone, between India & the UAE, will be conducted from Jan 2 to 15, 2024, in Rajasthan.”

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, potential areas of bilateral cooperation in the defence field are the production and development of defence equipment; joint exercises of armed forces and technical cooperation.

In recent years, bilateral defence cooperation has been strengthened, notably in the field of defence training and supply of defence inventory, besides regular exchange programmes. — PTI

Day after attack, Manipur tense

IMPHAL, DECEMBER 31 The situation in Manipur's Moreh town continues to be tense a day after three commandos of Manipur Police were injured in a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attack at one of their posts in the border town on Saturday night, officials said.

“The commandos are now being treated at the Assam Rifles KPL camp and are stated to be out of danger,” the police said. — PTI

Modi to visit TN, Lakshadweep on Jan 2-3

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31 Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Tamil Nadu and Lakshadweep on January 2 and 3 during which he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects, his office said on Sunday.

On January 2, Modi will reach Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu and will be the chief guest at the 38th Convocation Ceremony of Bharathidasan University, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

At a public programme in Tiruchirappalli, the PM will lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 19,850 crore related to aviation, rail, road, oil and gas, shipping and higher education sectors.

Modi will then reach Agatti in Lakshadweep where he will address a public function. On January 3, he will reach Kavaratti in Lakshadweep, where he will lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects in Lakshadweep related to sec-

tors such as telecommunications, drinking water, solar power and health.

During his visit to Lakshadweep, Modi will lay the foundation stone of development projects, including the Kochi-Lakshadweep Islands Submarine Optical Fiber Connection project, worth over Rs 1,150 crore.

He will also dedicate to the nation the Low Temperature Thermal Desalination plant at Kadmat, which will produce 1.5 lakh litres of clean drinking water every day. — PTI

Export of processed food, agri products sees decline of 9.32%

NEERAJ MOHAN  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31 India's export of agricultural and processed food products has seen a 9.32 per cent decline from April to October in the fiscal year 2023-24 when compared to the last fiscal.

Traders suffered a loss of around \$1,438 million as the overall export earnings came down to \$13,985 million, year-on-year basis from April to October 2023 from \$15,423 million in the same period of the previous year, revealed the latest export data released by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).

This decline in agricultural exports is noteworthy, especially against the backdrop of specific commodities demonstrating contrasting trends.

The overall exports of cereals suffered a decline of nearly 24 per cent during this period. It came down to \$6,290 million from \$8,258 million, as

KEY FARM EXPORTS		
Year	2023-24 (April-Oct)	2022-23 (April-Oct)
Non-basmati rice	2,904	3,637
Basmati rice	2,959	2,545
Wheat	23	1,507
Other cereals	404	570
Total	13,985	15,423

\*FIGURES IN USD MILLION BY APEDA

the wheat exports were the worst affected and reported a fall of nearly 98 per cent due to the blanket ban imposed on exports by the government to counter spiralling prices in the domestic market.

However, the basmati export witnessed a 16.27 per cent rise, reaching \$2,959 million from \$2,545 million during the previous year as the country exported a total 2,608 million tonnes (MT) of rice against 2,545 MT. The figure revealed that total exports of long-grained aromatic rice increased to 26.08 lakh MT during this year against 24.10 lakh MT during

the previous year.

Due to the ban, the country's non-basmati rice export suffered a setback with a decline of 20.16 per cent.

Interestingly, India's buffalo meat export has registered 11.31 per cent increase during this period as the meat traders exported 7.34 lakh MT meat against 6.70 lakh MT last year. Despite the positive momentum in basmati exports, the overall scenario is marked by a challenging landscape for the farm sector. The Centre's imposition of curbs on shipment of various commodities has played a significant role in shaping this trend.

6 killed in Maha factory inferno

MUMBAI, DECEMBER 31 Six workers were killed after a fire broke out in a hand gloves manufacturing factory in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar district in the wee hours of Sunday.

The blaze erupted around 1 am in the Sunshine Enterprises unit located in the Waluj industrial area.

Thirteen workers were sleeping on the premises when the incident took place.

Six of them were killed, while the seven others managed to come out by breaking the tin roof of the factory, the official said.

Police Commissioner Manoj Lohiya said, “The fire broke out in the Sunshine Enterprises factory, which makes cotton and leather hand gloves, in Waluj. The police control room came to know about the incident around 1.15 am. After being alerted, the fire brigade rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control around 3.30 am,” he said. — PTI

**CANTONMENT BOARD OFFICE, JALANDHAR**  
1. The draft regulations for digging and use of bore wells in Jalandhar Cantonment which the Jalandhar Cantonment Board proposes to make in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (4) of Section 204 of the Cantonment Act, 2006 (41 of 2006) is hereby published, as required by sub-section (1) of Section 350 of the Cantonments Act, 2006, for the information of all persons likely to be affected thereby and notice is hereby given that the said draft regulations will be taken into consideration by Cantonment Board, Jalandhar after the expiry of thirty days from the date of publication of this notice.  
2. Any objections or suggestions which may be received from any person with respect to the said draft before the expiry of the period of thirty days stated above will be considered by the Jalandhar Cantonment Board.  
3. Detailed draft regulations for digging and use of borewells in Jalandhar Cantonment has been uploaded on Jalandhar Cantonment Board website <http://jalandhar.cant.gov.in> and also placed on the Office Notice Board for perusal of the general public.  
4. Any person who intends to file objections/ suggestions in respect of the draft regulations for digging and use of the borewells may submit the same in the office of the Cantonment Board Jalandhar in person or through dak or by email on 30.01.2024 or before the expiry of a period of thirty days from the date of publication of this notice.  
Tele No. 0181-2260250  
E-mail:- [ceojalan-stats@nic.in](mailto:ceojalan-stats@nic.in) DI-26241  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cantonment Board, Jalandhar.

**GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH**  
**JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG**  
**"NOTICE INVITING TENDER"**  
The Assistant Engineer, Jal Shakti Sub-Division, Dehra invites following tenders on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following work through offline process:-  

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	Earnest Money	Time Completion
1	A/R & M/O various LIS/LWSS under JSV Division, Dehra JSV Sub-Division, Dehra in Tehsil Dehra, Dist. Kangra (HP) (SH-Providing, Supplying and installation Digital Photocopy)	130883/-	1990/-	Three Months

Last date of submission of tender 08/01/2024 up to 11.00 A.M. Last date application of tender from this Sub-Division Dehra 06/01/2024 up to 5.00 P.M.  
Assistant Engineer,  
Jal Shakti Sub-Division, Dehra.

DPR/JHP/4710

**NOTICE FOR OFFLINE TENDER**  
The Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Karsog invites tenders on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following work(s) through offline process:-  
**Job No. 1** Providing LWSS Sarour Khad to Tattapani and Churag adjoining area in Tehsil Karsog, (SH: C/o RCC S/Tank 20000 ltrs. capacity at Matehal & L/J/T of GI Pipe 25mm dia = 800 Rmt), **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 327180/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 6544/-, **Time:-** Three Months, **Job No. 2** LWSS Behna Khad to Gawalpur Teban and Sarahan under Sub-Division Kotlu in Tehsil Karsog (SH: Site Development from RD 60 to 120) Under JJM, **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 494458/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 9889/-, **Time:-** Three Months, **Job No. 3** LWSS Behna Khad to Gawalpur Teban and Sarahan under Sub-Division Kotlu in Tehsil Karsog (SH: Site Development from RD 0 to 60) Under JJM **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 494458/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 9889/-, **Time:-** Three Months, **Job No. 4** PLWSS Churag Bakhot in Section Churag in Tehsil Karsog, (SH: C/o Intake Chamber 04 Nos.), **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 238804/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 4776/-, **Time:-** Three Months, **Job No. 5** R/R Damages in FIS Parlog in GP Parlog in Tehsil Karsog, (SH: Restoration work at Kuhl), **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 323401/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 6468/-, **Time:-** Three Months, **Job No. 6** R/R Damages in WSS Parlog in GP Parlog in Tehsil Karsog, (SH: Restoration work in source), **Estimated Cost:-** Rs. 109246/- **Earnest Money:-** Rs. 2185/-, **Time:-** Three Months.  
**Date of opening of tender:** 03.01.2024 at 11.30 a.m.  
1. Last date of sale of tender from divisional office 02.01.2024 up to 03:00 p.m.  
2. The tender forms and other detailed conditions can be obtained from the website [www.hpiph.org](http://www.hpiph.org) or from office of above Executive Engineer upto date specified above.  
**Executive Engineer,**  
**Jal Shakti Division Karsog,**  
**Distt. Mandi HP.**  
**HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPARAK**  

DPR/MP/4716

**PUNJAB SMALL INDUSTRIES & EXPORT CORPORATION LTD.**  
**A State Government Undertaking**  
**TENDER NOTICE**  
Punjab Small Industries & Export Corporation Ltd. invite online bids for the work of **Balance/Finishing work of Gate House at Hi-Tech Valley, Dhanansu, Ludhiana.** (DNIT amount is Rs. 55.95 lakh).  

Availability of Tender Online for Bidding	01.01.2024
Last Date & Time for Online Submission of Bid	15.01.2024 & 11:00 A.M.
Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bid	16.01.2024 & 11:00 A.M.

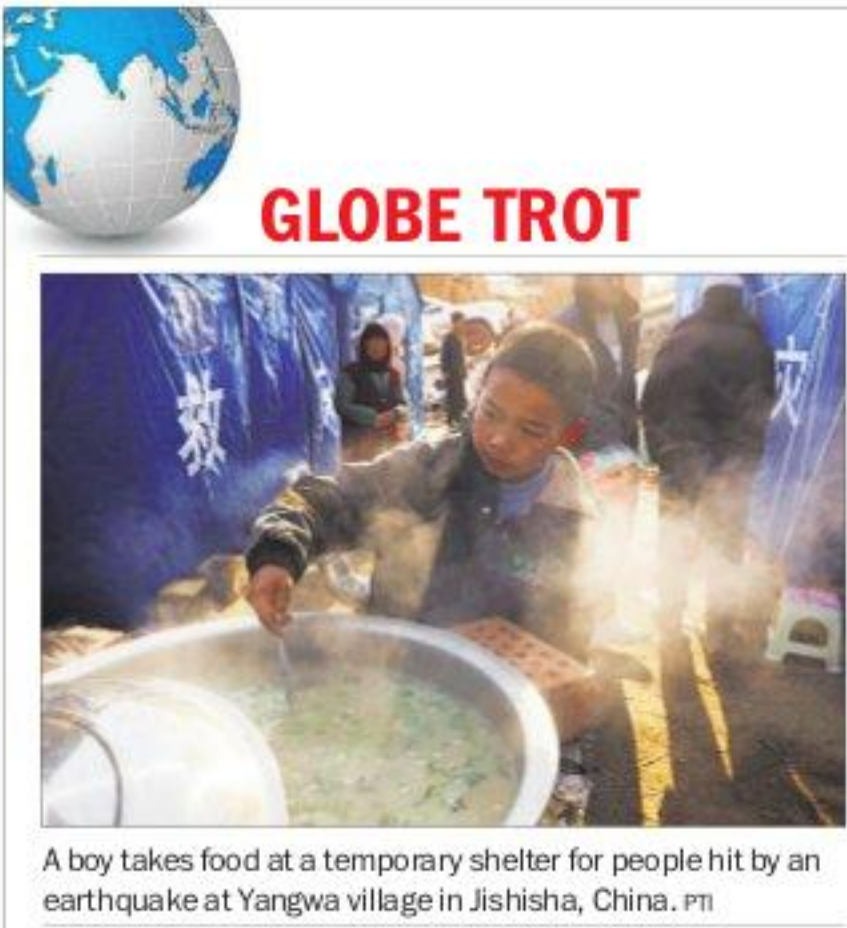
For details, logon to [www.eproc.punjab.gov.in](http://www.eproc.punjab.gov.in) only.  
**Note:-** Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.  
**Executive Engineer-I**  
**# 18, Himalaya Marg, Udyog Bhawan, Sector 17-A, Chandigarh — 160017 | Phone: 2702301-305** DPR/PS/30939

**PUNJAB SMALL INDUSTRIES & EXPORT CORPORATION LTD.**  
**A State Government Undertaking**  
**TENDER NOTICE**  
Punjab Small Industries & Export Corporation Ltd. invite online bids for the work of **Providing and fixing of Solar Cateye and Road Marking with hot applied thermoplastic compound at IFF Moga.** (DNIT amount is Rs. 13.00 lakh).  

Availability of Tender Online for Bidding	01.01.2024
Last Date & Time for Online Submission of Bid	10.01.2024 & 11:00 A.M.
Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bid	11.01.2024 & 11:00 A.M.

For details, logon to [www.eproc.punjab.gov.in](http://www.eproc.punjab.gov.in) only.  
**Note:-** Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.  
**Executive Engineer-I**  
**# 18, Himalaya Marg, Udyog Bhawan, Sector 17-A, Chandigarh — 160017 | Phone: 2702301-305** DPR/PS/30930





**Death toll in China earthquake rises to 151**  
**BEIJING:** The death toll in the 6.2-magnitude earthquake that jolted northwest China on December 18 has risen to 151, official sources said on Sunday. As per the provincial earthquake relief headquarters, the toll rose to 34 in Qinghai on Sunday as the last two persons previously unaccounted for after the earthquake were found dead. The temblor had also killed 117 in Gansu, the local authorities had said on December 22. **WNS**

**Venice to ban large tourist groups, loudspeakers**  
**ROME:** Venice, one of the Italy's most picturesque cities, is to ban tourist groups of more than 25 people and loudspeakers from June. The move was announced as use of loudspeakers on tours "can generate confusion and disturbances", a city official said. The official said the latest policies were aimed at improving the management of groups organised in the historic centre. Fearing that tourists could overwhelm the Canal City, residents are choosing to leave. **WNS**

**Snowfall shatters 40-year record in Seoul**  
**SEOUL:** South Korean capital Seoul received the maximum single-day snowfall recorded in December for more than 40 years on Saturday. There have been no reports of any weather-related deaths or injuries. The country's weather agency said on Sunday that 12.2 cm of snowfall was recorded in Seoul the previous day, which was the heaviest since 1981. **PTI**

**Top Pak actor calls for release of Indian films**  
**KARACHI:** Faysal Quraishi, one of Pakistan's top actors and producers, has advocated for the release of Indian films in the country to revive the local cinema exhibition sector. Quraishi, who has starred in several hit serials and also produced many blockbuster series, said Pakistan needed to lift the ban on screening of Indian films to survive and grow. **PTI**

**At 2L, Lanka sees 'record' tourist arrivals in Dec**  
**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka witnessed "record" tourist arrivals in December this year registering over 2 lakh footfall, highest in past four years, local media reported. Tourism Minister Harin Fernando said total foreign tourist arrivals this year have reached nearly 1.5 million, Daily Mirror reported. It indicates a positive trend in Sri Lanka's tourism industry. **WNS**

# Israeli strikes kill 35 in Gaza as Netanyahu hints at longer war

Former Palestinian minister dies in attack on Al-Maghazi refugee camp

**DEIRAL-BALAH, DECEMBER 31**  
Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 35 people Sunday, hospital officials said, as the military targeted areas in several parts of the territory a day after the country's prime minister said the war will continue for "many more months," resisting international calls for a cease-fire.

The military said Israeli forces were operating in Gaza's second-largest city, Khan Younis, and residents reported strikes in the central part of the tiny enclave, after Israel this week made that region the new focus of its war. The Ministry of Health in Gaza said a former Minister of Palestinian Authority was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the Gaza Strip. According to Health Ministry officials, Youssef Salama (68), former Palestinian Authority Minister for Religious Affairs, was



An Israeli mobile artillery unit fires a shell from southern Israel towards the Gaza Strip near the border on Sunday. **PTI**

**NO LET-UP IN OFFENSIVE**  
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel must maintain openended security control over the Gaza Strip. He said the war would continue for many more months. He reiterated his intention to preserve an Israeli military foothold in a narrow strip of land in southern Gaza near the border with Egypt.

killed in the airstrike at Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. The war has sparked a humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of Gaza residents facing starvation.

Israel's bombardments have levelled vast swaths of the territory, making parts uninhabitable and displacing some 85 per cent of Gaza's inhabitants.

Israel expanded its offensive to central Gaza this week, targeting a belt of dense urban neighbourhoods that house refugees from the war surrounding Israel's creation in 1948 and their descendants.

In the area of Zoweida in central Gaza, an Israeli airstrike killed 13 people, according to witnesses. The bodies were draped in white plastic and laid out in front of a hospital, where prayers were held before burial. "They were innocent people," said Hussein Siam, whose relatives were among the dead. Officials from Al-Aqsa Hospital in central Deir al-Balah said the 13 were among 35 bodies received on Sunday. —PTI



Kharkiv Palace Hotel damaged heavily by a Russian missile strike. **PTI**

# Russia pounds Kyiv to avenge Belgorod attack

**KYIV, DECEMBER 31**  
Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine on Saturday night after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod earlier in the day "would not go unpunished".

The Ukrainian air force said on Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

Twenty-eight persons were wounded in an attack on the eastern city of Kharkiv, regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov

said on Sunday. A central hotel, apartment buildings, kindergarten, shops and administrative buildings sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor's office.

In the Kyiv region that surrounds the capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire to break out at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. Power lines and a grain storage facility in the central Ukrainian region of Kirovohrad were damaged by a Russian attack. —Agencies

# Kim vows to launch 3 spy satellites in 2024

**SEOUL, DECEMBER 31**  
North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and introduce modern attack drones in 2024, as he called for "overwhelming" war readiness to cope with US-led confrontational moves, state media reported Sunday.

Kim's comments, made during a key ruling Workers' Party meeting to set state goals for next year, suggest he'll intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the US presidential elections in November. Observers say



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Kim believes a boosted nuclear capability would give him another chance to launch high-stakes summit diplomacy with the US to win sanctions relief if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House. —PTI

# As Taiwan Prez nominee defends right to rule, China calls him 'peace destroyer'

**TAIPEI, DECEMBER 31**  
China has slammed Taiwan presidential front-runner William Lai as a "destroyer of peace" following a televised debate on Saturday in which he defended Taiwan's right to rule itself as a democracy.

Chen Binhua, spokesman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said Lai's discourse at the debate was "full of confrontational thinking." He said Lai, who currently serves as Taiwan's vice president with the governing Democratic People's Party, is "the instigator of a potential dangerous war in the Taiwan Strait." Taiwan split from China amid



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends a meeting in Beijing. **REUTERS**

civil war in 1949, but Beijing continues to regard the island of 23 million with its high-tech economy as Chinese territory and has been ramping up its threat to achieve that by military force if necessary.

Lai on Saturday said he was open to holding talks with Beijing "as long as there is equality and dignity on both sides of the Taiwan Strait." He said Taiwan is not subordinate to China. —PTI

# After 52 years, Denmark's Queen to abdicate throne

**COPENHAGEN, DECEMBER 31**  
Denmark's Queen Margrethe II will abdicate on January 14 next year after 52 years on the throne and will be succeeded by her eldest son Crown Prince Frederik, she said her annual New Year's speech on Sunday. The 83-year-old queen, who took over the throne in 1972, is the longest-serving monarch in Europe following the death of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022.

"I have decided that now is the right time. On January 14, 2024, - 52 years after I succeeded my beloved father - I will step down as queen of Denmark," she said. —PTI

## INFOCUS AGRICULTURE CROP DIVERSIFICATION

# Plenty of room for boosting mushroom cultivation

Growing diverse types of mushrooms is preferable to dependence on the white-button type. China is growing about 60 types of mushrooms. India needs to strengthen its research & development programmes for making the most of biodiversity and focusing on improvement using biotechnological tools. Adoption of technologies by farmers can be a game-changer for enhancing their income. The development of food safety standards for fresh & processed mushrooms also requires due attention.

SS CHAHAL

**I**NCREASING farmers' income is an imperative requiring multiple interventions in view of the input-intensive, low-profit agriculture and the diverse pattern of farming in the country. Some alternative agricultural activities are highly productive; they utilise byproducts and employ locally available manpower to operate, manage and maintain production. One such activity is mushroom cultivation, which consumes agricultural residue, including wheat and paddy straw, requires less space/area and has the potential to enhance the income from farming. Even as a freestanding venture, it is potentially a profitable option for small and landless farmers.

Commercial cultivation of mushrooms commenced in India under the patronage of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 1961 in Solan (Himachal Pradesh); it got an impetus with the establishment of the Directorate of Mushroom Research of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR-DMR). The hill town is known as the 'Mushroom City' of India. Four types of mushrooms are mainly grown commercially in the country. White button, a temperate mushroom, has a share of more than 70 per cent. It is also predominant in tropical and sub-tropical regions. Oyster mushroom, with 15-16 per cent share, is grown in the sub-tropics and northeastern states. Paddy straw mushroom (around 7 per cent) and milky mushroom (3 per cent) are grown seasonally

## Fungi family

Mushrooms belong to the group of organisms called fungi. They lack green matter (chlorophyll) present in plants and grow on dead and decaying organic material. From these decaying substrates, they absorb nutrition with the help of fine thread-like structures (mycelium) which penetrate into the substratum and are generally not visible on the surface. After the mycelium has grown profusely and absorbed sufficient food material, it forms the reproductive structure, which generally comes out of the substrate and forms the fruiting body (mushroom). The fruiting body may be umbrella-like or of other shapes, sizes and colours.

## MAJOR MUSHROOM VARIETIES

White button (*Agaricus bisporus*)

Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus spp.*)

Paddy straw mushroom (*Volvariella volvacea*)

Milky mushroom (*Calocybe indica*)

Shiitake (*Lentinula edodes*)

Lingzhi or reishi (*Ganoderma lucidum*)

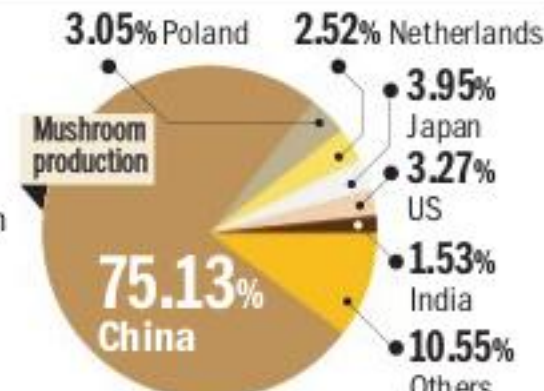
Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*)

Gucchi (*Morchella esculenta*)

in tropical and sub-tropical regions. Shiitake, another edible and medicinal mushroom, grown on wood logs, sawdust and corn cobs and supplemented with wheat and rice brawn, is gaining popularity for general cultivation. Mushrooms are now grown in almost all states of India. Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu are the major contributors, ranging from 7 to 13 per cent share in the total production. Per capita consumption (about 80 gm) in India is slowly increasing, but it is still far less compared to China (1.6 kg) and the US as well

## Scope for growth

India recorded cumulative aggregate growth rate of 6.15% for mushroom production for 2000-19



## COMPONENTS OF A MUSHROOM FARM

- Composting unit
- Outdoor phase-I composting platform or indoor bunkers/aerated chambers
- Indoor phase-II in peak heating/bulk past-chamber
- Peak heating chamber
- Bulk pasteurisation chamber
- Cooling of compost in summer months is a special requirement
- Casing pasteurisation chamber
- Spawn unit
- Spawn laboratory
- Cropping unit
- Seasonal cropping rooms
- Environment-controlled cropping rooms
- Environment-controlled airconditioning and forced air circulation
- Ancillary units
- Post-harvest handling unit
- Pre-cooling chamber
- Canning hall with canning line
- Packaging room

pendent agri-business activity for educated youths. Seasonal and small-scale growers should procure it from accredited private or government sources. The supply of free or subsidised spawn by government institutes can be of great assistance to rural farmers and bring more into the fold. Setting up own units for raising spawn is viable for round-the-year growers.

The government has permitted the establishment of 'controlled, conditioned' export units which don't face major problems regarding canning, value addition and marketing. But there are limitations for small and rural growers who have to sell it afresh. Because of a very short shelf life of the produce and the absence of refrigerated transport facilities over long distances, they have to explore nearby urban markets. Seasonal production causes over-saturation and sale at unremunerative prices during winter months. Unorganised marketing is a big disadvantage and an impediment to expansion. For efficient marketing, public sector undertakings, organised retailers and grower associations should opt for innovative packaging using environment-friendly biodegradable material under brand names, thus creating an organised distribution network and retail chain system. An estimated loss of up to 25 per cent occurs due to inappropriate post-harvest management practices like harvesting, storage, preservation, processing and marketing, which can be minimised through comprehensive extension activities, organising on-site training programmes for prospective growers round the year and low-cost

polyhouse/greenhouse cultivation. There is a need for policy interventions to encourage mushroom farming as a cottage industry by supporting cooperatives and farmer producer organisations, creating mushroom-specific agencies/boards, instituting centralised procuring and processing units to protect small and scattered growers from a seasonal glut, ensuring price stability, introducing and developing spawn standards, and establishing state-of-the-art compost and spawn centres for the supply of ready-to-use compost and spawn. Aspects like the use of spent substrate as fertiliser and the development of food safety standards for fresh and processed mushrooms also require due attention.

Growing diverse types of mushrooms is preferable to dependence on the white-button type. China is growing about 60 types of mushrooms. India needs to strengthen its research & development programmes for making the most of biodiversity and focusing on improvement using biotechnological tools. Other priorities should include expanding the cultivation base of medicinal mushrooms like *lingzhi* or *reishi* and maitake and introducing highly priced special-type *gucchi*. In 2013, an ICAR-constituted research advisory committee made these recommendations. In 2022, the ICAR-DMR announced the development of protocols for successfully producing fruiting bodies of the *gucchi* mushroom. Validation and adoption of such technologies by farmers can be a game-changer for enhancing their income.

The author is ex-VC, Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, Udaipur





DOUBLE TROUBLE

Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy won their first BWF World Super 1000 title and Asian Games gold. They also became world No. 1 and received the Khel Ratna.



NEXT BIG THING

Antim Panghal became the first Indian woman wrestler to win back-to-back U20 world titles. She also won bronze at the senior Worlds and Asian Games.



BULL'S-EYE

The women's compound team of Parneet Kaur, Aditi Swami and Jyothi Surekha Vennam created history by winning the country's first gold medal in the World Championships. The trio also finished on top at the Asian Games, where Indian archers won five gold medals.



NO SMALL FEET

The first female archer without arms to compete internationally, 16-year-old Sheetal Devi won three medals, including two gold, at the Asian Para Games.



SHOT AT GREATNESS

Sift Kaur Samra broke the world record to win gold in 50m rifle 3 positions at the Asian Games, where Indian shooters had a record haul of 7 gold, 9 silver and 6 bronze.

LOOKING BACK 2023

It was a year of new highs, familiar heartbreaks and a controversy that rocked Indian sports. The year started with top wrestlers accusing the WFI president of sexually harassing female wrestlers. After lengthy protests, the federation was suspended, but even as 2024 arrives, the controversy has refused to die down as the newly-elected body was again suspended by the government. In cricket, the men's team could not end its long wait for an ICC trophy, losing in the WTC and World Cup finals. At the Asian Games, India finished fourth with a record haul of 107 medals. India's para-athletes followed it up with a record-breaking 111 medals.



WAIT CONTINUES

Rohit Sharma's team failed to end India's global title drought stretching back to the 2013 Champions Trophy. India fell to Australia in the finals of the World Test Championship and ODI World Cup.



SERIAL WINNERS

Australia topped India in the final to win the 50-over World Cup title for the sixth time and cement their status as the most successful team in the tournament's history.

CHAMPIONS 2023



NEW MASTER

Virat Kohli surpassed his idol Sachin Tendulkar to become the first batter to reach 50 ODI hundreds.



SUPER JADEJA

Ravindra Jadeja hit a last-ball four as Chennai Super Kings beat Gujarat Titans in the final to win a record-equalling fifth IPL title.



SOARING HIGHER

Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra became the first Indian to win a World Championships title. He also won the Asian Games gold, with Kishore Jena making it a historic one-two finish for India.



GOAT

Novak Djokovic reached the final of all the Majors and won three to go past Rafa Nadal's 22 and equal Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slams.



WONDERKID

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa made history by becoming the youngest player to reach the World Cup final. The 18-year-old lost to Norwegian great Magnus Carlsen to win silver and qualify for the 2024 Candidates Tournament.



PEP TALK

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City won the Champions League title for the first time, also completing a famous treble.



GOLDEN BALM

The men's hockey team started the year with a 9th place finish at the World Cup. They bounced back from the heartbreak by reclaiming the Asian Games title and qualifying for the Paris Olympics.



WRESTLEMANIA

Indian wrestling was rocked by sexual harassment allegations and protests against the WFI president, leading to the federation's suspension.



# In poll year, SC to give verdicts on electoral bonds, immunity to corrupt lawmakers

**SATYA PRAKASH**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
As India heads to the 2024 General Election, the Supreme Court is all set to pronounce verdicts in the new year on several matters of political significance, including the validity of electoral bonds scheme and blanket immunity given to bribe-taker lawmakers under parliamentary privileges.

A five-judge Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud — which on November 2 reserved its verdict on petitions challenging the validity of the electoral bonds scheme — is expected to pronounce it following the reopening of the Supreme

**DECISION ON LIFETIME BAN ON TAINTED LEADERS, TOO**

Besides delivering the verdicts on the validity of electoral bonds scheme and blanket immunity given to bribe-taker lawmakers under parliamentary privileges, the Supreme Court will also consider the issue of imposing a lifetime ban on tainted leaders from contesting elections.

Court after the winter break.

Introduced through the Finance Act, 2017, an electoral bond is a bearer instrument like a promissory note that can be purchased by an Indian citizen or an Indian company whose identity would remain secret from everybody except the SBI from whom it has to be purchased. Once purchased, the buyer can give it to a political party, which can encash it using its bank account. It was notified on January 2, 2018.

A seven-judge Constitution Bench led by CJI Chandrachud on October 5 reserved verdict on reconsideration of its 1998 judgement, which had held that MPs and MLAs enjoyed immunity from prosecution for taking bribes for “anything said or any vote given” in the House.

Twenty-six years after a five-judge Constitution Bench in PV Narasimha Rao’s case ruled that a lawmaker was immune to prosecution even if he/she took money to vote on the floor

of the House, the top court will settle the law on the scope of parliamentary privileges under Article 105(2) and Article 194(2).

The important question of law relating to parliamentary privilege under Article 105 and Article 194 of the Constitution was referred to a five-judge Constitution Bench by a three-judge Bench headed by then CJI Ranjan Gogoi on March 7, 2019, in connection with JMM legislator Sita Soren’s plea claiming protection under the top court’s ruling in Rao’s case after being accused of taking a bribe during a Rajya Sabha election.

The Supreme Court would also consider the issue of imposing a lifetime ban on tainted

leaders from contesting elections in the new year.

It will also hear PILs against freebies given by political parties. Acting on advocate Ashwini Kr Upadhyay’s PIL, the top court had on August 3, 2022, asked the Centre, Niti Aayog, Finance Commission, Law Commission, RBI and members of ruling and Opposition parties to give constructive suggestions to address the issue of irrational poll-eve freebies to influence the electorate.

A five-judge Constitution Bench — which on December 12 reserved its decision on petitions challenging the validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Amendment Act — would deliver the verdict in 2024.

# INS Vikrant equipped with new radar, missile launch platform

**AJAY BANERJEE**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
Indian Navy’s first indigenously designed and manufactured aircraft carrier, the INS Vikrant, is back sailing, after completing a mandatory ‘guarantee refit’ at the Cochin Shipyard, which originally made the 45,000 tonne warship.

“The sailing is part of the sea trials after the refit,” sources said adding that a key addition is the launch platform for medium range surface-to-air missiles — the Barak 8. The carrier has also now been fitted with Israel-designed MFSTAR (multi-function surveillance, track and guidance radar) — both are crucial as the warship is heading for an operational deployment in January.

The MF-STAR detects airborne threats like aircraft, anti-ship missiles and cruise missiles, the Barak-8 missile can shoot these at ranges of 80 km or more.

In the first week of December, Vice Admiral MA Hampiholi, who headed the Southern Naval Command, told reporters in Kochi that Vikrant would be “operationalised” by the end of January 2024. Vice Admiral Hampiholi retired today and is succeeded by Vice Admiral V Srinivas.

The INS Vikrant also has new Commanding Officer Captain Birendra S Bains,



A helicopter lands on aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

**MF-STAR RADAR SYSTEM**

The indigenously designed and manufactured aircraft carrier is now fitted with an Israel-designed multi-functional MF-STAR radar system and launch platform for medium range surface-to-air missiles — Barak 8.

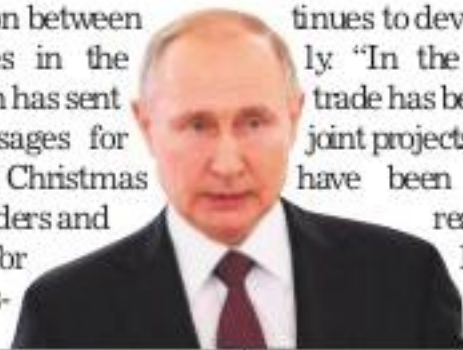
# Ties with India improving dynamically, says Putin in New Year’s greetings

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
Russian President Vladimir Putin has conveyed his New Year greetings to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In his message, Putin emphasised that despite challenging global circumstances, the relationship between India and Russia had been progressing

dynamically. Additionally, Putin acknowledged the significant advancements and bilateral cooperation between both countries in the past year. Putin has sent personal messages for New Year and Christmas to 24 world leaders and the Pope. For India, the mes-

sage said the special and privileged strategic partnership between Russia and India continues to develop dynamically. “In the outgoing year, trade has been growing and joint projects in various areas have been implemented,” read the Russian President’s message. — TNS



# Rajnath: Developing strong ecosystem of self-reliance

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
The government is developing a strong base of domestic defence industrial ecosystem to make India a strategic economy, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said today.

He was addressing the 21st convocation ceremony of Tezpur University, Assam.

“The Ministry of Defence

is making all efforts to achieve the target of becoming self-reliant in the sector,” he said.

Highlighting the various steps taken by the Ministry of Defence to achieve ‘aatmanirbharta’ (self-reliance) in defence, Rajnath said the import of arms had been restricted. — TNS

FOG IN DELHI

17 FLIGHTS

23 TRAINS DELAYED

People at New Delhi's Kartavya Path on a foggy Sunday. MR BHUI

**SEVERE COLD WAVE TO GRIP NORTH**

■ The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted severe cold wave conditions in some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan till January 2

■ It said dense fog (visibility less than 50 metres) is likely to prevail in parts of Haryana, Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh. TNS

# From today, CBSE to offer counselling to students for exam preparation

**NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31**  
The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Sunday announced provision of psychological counselling facilities starting from January 1 for students and parents. This initiative is strategically aligned with the already announced exam schedule for practical and theory papers, which commence on January 1 and February 15, respectively.

“The CBSE will provide psychological counselling facility to students and parents from January 1, 2024. The exam schedule for practical and theory papers has already been announced. The psychological counselling has been aligned accordingly for students’ facilitation,” said a CBSE press note.

According to the press note, counselling facilities were as follows: “Free IVRS facility will be made available 24x7 for students and parents on board’s toll-free number 1800-11-8004. Through this, information and suggestions about stress-free preparation for examinations, time and stress management, frequently asked questions (FAQs), important contact details of CBSE offices, can be accessed in Hindi and English.”

**TRAINED COUNSELLORS**

“This year, a total of 65 principals, trained counsellors, and special educators from CBSE affiliated government and private schools and psychologists are providing this facility. cbse

Bilingual podcasts on the same subjects can also be listened to on the CBSE official website, www.cbse.gov.in. The board will also provide tele-counselling. “This year, a total of 65 principals, trained counsellors, and special educators from CBSE affiliated government and private schools and psychologists are providing this facility,” it said. Of these, 52 are from India, 13 are from Kuwait, Nepal, Japan, Doha-Qatar, Oman and United Arab Emirates. Since 1998, the Board has been continuously providing psychological counselling in two phases, before the examination and after the result, with the objective to keep the students of Class X and XII of CBSE affiliated schools stress-free during the examinations. — ANI

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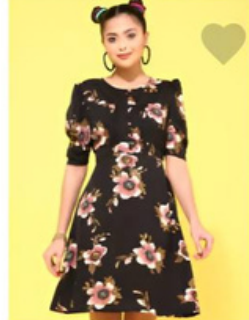
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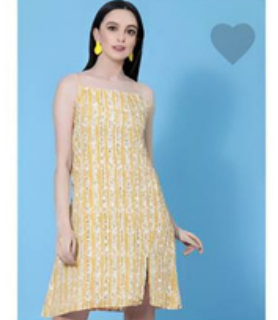
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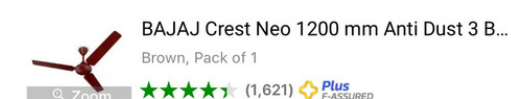
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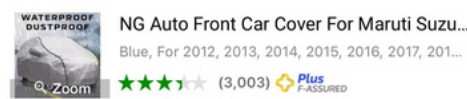


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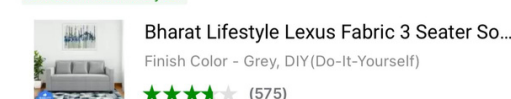
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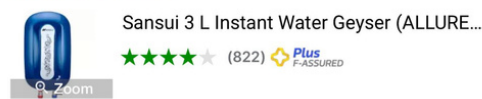


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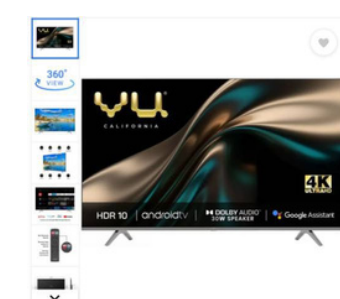


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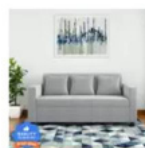
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